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# LITTLE KATE KIRBY.

BY

F. W. ROBINSON,

AUTHOR OF

“GRANDMOTHER’S MONEY,” “NO CHURCH,”

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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# BOOK I.

A HARD STRUGGLE.





# LITTLE KATE KIRBY.

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## CHAPTER I.

### PREPARING FOR A SURPRISE.

I WONDER if I came back to England any richer than I went away. I had left it in search of peace rather than of riches, and it was with no hope of fortune-making that I had turned my back upon home. I had left home to make one less—that was all. There were fifteen shillings and sixpence and a lock of Katie's hair in my possession when I said good-bye; there were ten shillings and fourpence-halfpenny and Kate's hair still to the good when I came back again.

Certainly I had grown no richer in a pecuniary sense of the word, but I do not mean that exactly. Riches I had not dreamed of when I went away as uncle's housekeeper and companion, and general help at Pietermaritzburg. My uncle was a poor missionary, trying to turn Zulus into zealots, and had never known in all his working life how to scrape ten pounds together that he could call his own. I was of use to him a little, and I earned enough to keep myself as teacher out there, and that was the extent of my ambition; but had I grown what my uncle would have called "richer in grace?"—richer even in patience and in that art of self-repression of which I understood so little in my first start outwards? Heaven knows! I do not believe that I returned to London any poorer, and I think that there was a trifle more of that patience which I needed, and of that courage which it is just possible I never lacked. I came back four years older, perhaps four years staidier—at least I thought that I was staidier; but then what four calm, good years they had been in the Natal country, where

there had been only the atmosphere to keep my blood at fever-heat! Sometimes I think that those four years were the happiest of my life. If I rebelled secretly against their sweet peaceful monotony, not knowing what was best for me, I have repented of my youthful restlessness, and look back yearningly through tear-dimmed eyes at the little African settlement, and the gaunt old uncle whom everybody loved, and whose home I left more lonely than I found it—for he had grown used to my ways, and was sorry to see the last of me.

We had had much conversation about it, and it was his wish, too, that I should go. He considered not only that it was best for me, but that it was my duty to follow in every respect the paternal commands, that I should once more take my place by my father's side and little Kate's. And in my heart I was ungrateful, and glad to leave Uncle Jef. He saw it, but he did not reprove me, or seem hurt. It was my natural craving for home; those whom I loved the best, and who, I hoped, loved me the best, were all in England.

That is why I left Pietermaritzburg and came to London, wondering if I were any richer than when I went away—wondering, too, whether they would see an improvement in me, and what improvement I should find in them, after four years of separation. I did not know where father and Katie were living; my father in his last note had not supplied the information. His letter had been vague and wandering, as if a sudden chance of riches had bewildered him exceedingly. After telling me all about Kate, which Kate, in her school-girl's hand, had told me for herself, he said:—

“I don't know where I shall be when this letter reaches you, dear Faith, or what home I shall possess in which to welcome your return. It will certainly be a bigger and braver home than you anticipate, judging from that dark little den in Dorset Street, Blackfriars, where you would not stop any longer—and quite right too. I shall be easy to find, child; from nine a.m. to six p.m., I shall be at my post as principal cashier to the firm of Westmair and Son, Watling Street, City. All the facts when we

meet: not now. Pray come at once; come straight to Westmair's, where you used to bring my dinner when I was only a poor book-keeper on an indifferent salary, and we will go forth to the new home together. I shall enjoy your astonishment at all that has changed my life since your absence. I shall have arranged everything; the *coup de théâtre* will be complete by your arrival. You know, Faith, how fond I have always been of surprises, and this will indeed be a great surprise to you. COME AT ONCE."

Then followed a postscript, more bewildering than his letter.

"P.S.—Don't imagine that my lift at Westmair's has anything to do with all that I have said. It is not that. I ought to have had the cashier's berth long ago—you are aware how I have been served by these people, for whom my father wasted his life before me. Katie's love. I have given her strict injunctions not to mention business in any way, but the mail will probably bring you a letter from herself."

Of course it brought a letter, that was as full

of mysterious hints as my father's had been, despite my father's injunctions; and it spoke of new life, and a big fortune, and begged me also to return immediately. Neither in my father's letter nor in Kate's had there been a thought for Uncle Jef's feelings, or how Uncle Jef would bear the idea of parting with me. In the excitement of my father's and Katie's childish exultation, Jeffery Kirby had been completely overlooked. He was a little grave for a time, but he did not in any way comment upon the neglect.

"Is it a dream?" I asked.

"If your father had not always been one of the most despondent men on the face of the earth, I should have been inclined to think so, Faith," my uncle replied.

"What shall I do?"

"Go, if my brother wishes it," was the answer. "I have no doubt it is for the best."

So I collected my savings together; there was not quite enough to pay my passage back, but uncle found a sovereign to lend me, and away I sailed one morning to take my share

of the fortune that had come late in life to the Kirbys. I was sixteen when I left London for Natal. I had just passed my twentieth birthday when, one October afternoon, the steam-tug *Ariadne* towed the fast-sailing ship *The Clipper* up the river Thames towards the docks, whence I had started four years since on my apprenticeship to life. Having served out that apprenticeship, or my uncle having cancelled my indentures, here I was back again like a bad shilling. And here began my life in earnest.

## CHAPTER II.

I AM MORE SURPRISED THAN I BARGAINED FOR.

WATLING STREET is not the pleasantest of thoroughfares when the fog is thick in town, and the hour is close on sunset. It was five o'clock by St. Paul's Cathedral, and the fog was thick enough to eat, when I was once more in the old, narrow, grimy City street which runs parallel with bustling Cheapside. It was not a fine day to return to the old life, and to feel as I went on slowly in the street's shadow, and in the thick mist of that dying afternoon, that here at least there had been no outward change. They might have been only four hours since I was last in London—indeed, there was no difference, save in the fog abroad that day, from the time



when I was a little child, and carried father's dinner to the office, as he had reminded me in the last letter that he had written. He had been book-keeper then, taken on in charity when his own business had failed—purely out of charity, and with no consideration for the family services, my father had said somewhat ungratefully. I could almost imagine that I, a long-limbed bony girl of ten years of age, was once more stalking to the office with my basket of provisions for father, who liked his dinner sent him punctually, and sent hot and well cooked—two desiderata which, he affirmed, no eating-house in the neighbourhood had been ever able to accomplish. But mother was living then, and he had believed that no one could do anything so well as mother.

Yes, no difference in Watling Street. The houses were as gaunt and dull as ever, and only the lights were flickering in the windows of the warehouses a little while before their time. There were not many people about in the fog; the street was very quiet; a few people ran against me, and begged my pardon, as they or

I slipped from the greasy pavement into the roadway. I could hear coughs of various degrees of bassness echoing from dusky interiors; there was a steam on all the windows, as if the clerks had had their hot dinners brought them, and had taken off the covers simultaneously; there were shadows of humanity darting to and fro from the streets that opened right and left, and led to busier thoroughfares; there were two waggons blocking up the street, and their drivers arguing with each other as to right of precedence; and there was a dog which had lost itself, and was sniffing in and out of every open doorway.

Odd enough it was that I should have passed Westmair's office and gone on as far as Queen Street, for I knew the place thoroughly, and it had not changed much. It might have been the fog that led me astray—it was more likely to have been the crowd of old fancies and old hopes which came to me again, and led me too far over the stones that I knew almost by heart.

“How foolish of me!” I soliloquised, and then I walked back to the office on the ground floor,

and read the name of Westmair and Son on the left hand side of the door-post, and looked in upon a wilderness of packages, and tin cans on narrow shelves, with one jet of gas burning in the shop by way of protest against the general murkiness of atmosphere, and not with any idea of illuminating the interior of the premises. They had never cared for much light in Westmair's office—chance customers were rare, and the office-keeper had little to do with people who came in from the street. Westmair's was all connection, correspondence, and commercial travellers' business. Looking at Westmair's from Watling Street, was to set down the great house as not worth its salt. Strangers making a short cut to the Mansion House, or whose offices were in broader thoroughfares, might have passed Westmair's all their lives without knowing it; it was a strip of a house even where houses ran in strips as a rule. This was only Westmair's London office—a place which was handy for the London folk, but not imperative for the Westmairs to possess—a crotchet of the firm, that had always had faith in City

offices for anything. Westmairs' proper was ten miles from London, and the Westmair's oils and the Westmair's polish, which had made the fortune of the family, were kept and mixed in large quantities miles away from the shadow of St. Paul's. This was only a house of samples and orders, and general correspondence.

I turned the handle of the half-glass door—had the glass been cleaned since I was there last?—and passed into the stuffy shop. All was very misty, scarcely to be accounted for by the fog which had come in with me from the street. Perhaps there were tears in my eyes at the prospect of meeting my father after four long years—at the thought of beginning life again with him from that very moment, as it were. I went cautiously towards the counting-house at the end of the shop; it went up three or four steps, and was shut from public gaze, when there was any representative of the public to gaze at it, by a second glass front, behind which was a wire blind, behind which was a lamp burning brightly, behind which was some one, with his back towards me, writing at a

desk. My father in his new post of principal cashier, indubitably!

When I was in London last, he had sat at a little desk below this window, with a gas jet above his premature greyness, and had blown verbal communications through a gutta-percha pipe into the office above him; but times had changed, and now there was a little bald man with a bent back to blow at my father instead.

I had not seen this last-named personage, and was proceeding boldly to the inner sanctum, when he piped out, "What's your business, young lady?" and focussed me with two horn-rimmed spectacles. This old gentleman was the new clerk—the office and book-keeper. I knew all about him at once. My father's rise had left a vacancy in the post which my grandfather had been the first of our family to fill; there had been no more Kirbys to the good, and hence an advertisement, and this worn-out, broken-down man at eighty pounds a year! Westmair's never gave more than eighty pounds a year for their office-keeper—they called this little, dusky, ill-smelling shop an office!—and

possibly the situation was not worth more, for there had been hundreds always ready to jump at it. There had never seemed a great deal to do for the money—I had often caught my father dozing over the books, although it was his fixed idea that Westmair's worked him like a horse, and I believe this old man had been asleep before I had intruded on the premises.

He was alive to business very quickly—juniors in office are frequently the most energetic of the staff.

“What's your business, young lady?”

“Oh, if you please, don't speak so loudly,” I said, gesticulating towards the counting-house; “I want to surprise him.”

The office-keeper looked from me to the window over his head, and then back from the window to me, and glared. It was full a minute and a half before the idea seized him, and then he grinned from ear to ear, and turned me a little qualmish with three yellow tusks and a furry tongue, of which he made the most.

“Oh, you know Mr.——”

“Of course I know him. I have come thou-

sands of miles to see him, all the way from the Cape of Good Hope !”

The book-keeper, or office-keeper, looked somewhat amazed at this avowal, for he shut his mouth and glared at me again through his ugly spectacles.

“You can go up, then,” he said, dipping his pen into the ink and flourishing it towards the counting-house, “if he expects you. Does he expect you ?”

“To be sure he does.”

“I shouldn’t have thought it of him,” he muttered ; “in business hours, too—well !”

I did not stay to explain more fully my conduct to one who had evidently set me down for a very forward young woman. I was in a hurry to embrace my dear dad, and to hear him murmur forth, “My darling Faith—I am so glad that you have come back !” He would be glad of that, I was very sure. Man of many faults as he was, peevish, discontented, and eccentric, I had always thought that he had loved his girls in his way. My woollen dress did not betray me by any rustling, as I ascended the



steps, on the top of which my heart began beating nervously—I hardly knew for what reason. The dialogue beneath the counting-house window had not disturbed the studies of the cashier, who was very much bent over his desk, as I pushed open the door and stole in. It was a small counting-house, with an iron safe on one side of the room, that looked respectable and solid. How quickly the Westmairs made money in a quiet way, was evident by that big safe, and by the cheques which had come by the last post, and which the cashier was examining and endorsing before locking up for the night, now that banking hours were over. I laid my hands upon his shoulders, and said—

“I have come back, dear, as you asked me—back for good! Don’t be very much afraid, or very much scared, but take time to think that I am here, your little Faith!”

All this was said in a low whisper, for I knew that my father was nervous, and I wished to surprise him, not to frighten him. But before it was all said, or almost before—for I have a faint recollection of going on with a few more words,



even after my discovery—I had become aware that my hands were not resting on my father's shoulders, which were round shoulders, and weak, and would have given way more, and that in lieu of the scanty grey-flecked hairs of Mr. Kirby, there was rising up before me a curlier, darker, and more vigorous head of hair.

“Oh, my!” I gasped forth, and then a sun-burnt face turned round as my hands dropped to my side, and my tongue stuck to the roof of my mouth. He was a young man of some four or five-and-twenty years of age before whom I was standing—a principal probably, a West-mair, or a somebody of importance who had taken my father's post for a day or two. He was inclined to laugh at me and my embarrassment. I saw the curves of his mouth trying hard to keep themselves down, and a pair of big brown eyes seemed laughing already. I was ashamed of myself, and I grew hot and indignant and “fussy,” and thought that he might have shown more consideration for one who had made so egregious a blunder. He rose from his chair at last.

"I beg your pardon," he said, seeing how grave I had become, "but I think this is the wrong office. You—you'll find it higher up the street, perhaps."

He was a trifle confused himself now, and gave an odd and impulsive scratch to his head, forcible but inelegant.

"No, it is not the wrong office; I have been very foolish; pray forgive my rudeness, sir, but I only expected to find one person here—not you, certainly," I stammered forth.

"You have got into the wrong place, I think," was his reply, "unless—oh, dear!—whose place do you want, may I inquire?"

"Mr. Westmair's."

"Oh!"

He ran his fingers through his hair again—taking two hands this time, and becoming thereby much fiercer in aspect—and then turned suddenly so pale that I thought he must be a very delicate young man.

"You are Mr. Westmair, I presume?" I said.

"My name is Westmair, certainly—not one of

*the* Westmairs, but an offshot—a family connection—a hanger-on—a—I hope you follow me—I hope you are—that is, that you are not—may I take the liberty of inquiring what is your name?” he asked with sudden energy and decision.

“My name is Kirby.”

“Oh—I see!”

He sat down in the chair which he had half pushed towards me a few minutes since, and which I had not occupied, and dashed at his cheques and papers with extraordinary interest, turning his back upon me and ignoring my presence altogether. It was very strange and startling, and I was beginning to think that all might not be well—that all might be very ill for me—as some of the papers fluttered to the floor without the gentleman taking heed of them. He had been surprised, he was now confused.

“My name is Kirby,” I explained more fully, “and I have called at my father’s request. It was his wish that I should come direct to the office.”

“Oh—indeed—confound it!—was it though?”

“Something has happened!—he has left here?”

“Yes—he has left,” said Mr. Westmair, slowly; “I’ll tell you in a minute—you don’t know anything, then?”

“Not anything—save that he was fortunate in life when he wrote to me.”

“When was that?”

“Some months ago, he wrote to me at Pietermaritzburg. Oh, sir, he has not met with an accident—he is not dead? You would not keep me in this suspense if he were dead, I am sure!”

“No, no—he is not dead, I am sorry to say—I mean I am glad to say. Pray sit down—pray compose yourself. I will tell you everything in a minute.”

He had forgotten that he was occupying the only chair in the room, and that I was leaning for support against a wainscot partition, yearning for the news, the bad news, which I knew now was on its way towards me. What could have happened since my father’s stroke of good luck to have so wholly changed the scene? Was

he really mad when he wrote last, and was his fortune only a dream?

“I—I hope that I have been patient, sir—but I—I am very anxious,” I hinted at last.

He looked round quickly, then rose, snatched up his hat, and walked sharply from the counting-house, down the steps into the office, and towards the street.

Was he going to fetch my father, or what? I peered through the window above the wire blind as he went striding along the shop. The street-door was opened before he had reached it, and a tall, swarthy man entered and regarded the cashier with amazement.

“What’s the matter?”

“Nothing. That is, only Kirby’s daughter from the Cape; she is in the counting-house.”

“Well—you have told her, I suppose?”

“No, I haven’t—I couldn’t; upon my soul, I couldn’t—I must leave it to you.”

“Why, this is cowardice.”

“Very likely; I am naturally a coward. Tell her as gently as you can; she seems a very nice girl, poor thing.”

“ But——”

“ But I’m hanged if I do all the dirty work in this place ; it does not suit me ; and I can’t tell that girl, who came in just now, all life and hope, the truth about her father. Tell her yourself, Abel.”

The swarthy man seemed more astonished by the excitable behaviour of his cashier than by the news of my presence in his office. He went to the door and looked out in the fog after his refractory subordinate, then with slow, precise steps, he came towards me and my sinking heart. I wished that the other man had stopped to tell me all the truth, though he had taken longer time about it. I did not like this hard-lined face, which seemed advancing towards me like a fate beyond my power to resist.

## CHAPTER III.

## I LEARN ALL THE NEWS.

THE gentleman who entered the counting-house, and took the place of his eccentric cashier, was a man of thirty years of age, who might have told the world that he was forty-five, without surprising it in the least. He was a tall, stiff-backed man, with one of the saddest countenances I had ever seen; stern it was as well as sad, in many respects, but it was not so wholly inflexible as I had fancied from my first look at it. He was very dark, with black eyes that seemed cold and unsympathetic, and unlike black eyes in general, and his close-shaven cheeks and chin did not give him one day's younger aspect. If he had shorn himself of all

hirsute decoration for that purpose, it had been a mistake in art, and had only given him a grim Don Quixote-looking head that was not pleasant to confront. He entered slowly, and after regarding me attentively for an instant, bowed, and pushed the chair more towards me.

“You are Miss Kirby,” he said. “Sit down, please; you had better sit down, I think.”

I sat down, thus adjured. I was in no hurry for the news now. I knew that it would be bad enough, and there came over me the wish, strangely at variance with my late impatience, to delay the revelation which this man, in his cold hard tones, would give me, as the hammer of a bell might strike out its time of day.

“My name is Westmair—Abel Westmair, of the firm of Westmair and Son. I am the son,” he added, as if by some mischance I should take him for his father.

I bowed, but I could not speak to him. I was not awed by the greatness of his position, but by the consciousness of the terrible nature of his forthcoming revelation.



"You are Miss Faith Kirby, I presume, to whom I wrote a few weeks since, suggesting that you should remain in Pietermaritzburg, and not come to London as your father had previously desired," he continued. "It was his wish too, I believe, that you should stay ; but I was following out my own ideas, certainly not his."

"Is he dead, then ? Oh, he *is* dead !" I cried very quickly now.

"Pardon me, but he is not dead. He——How careless!" and Mr. Westmair, junior, stooped under the table, picked up several cheques and papers, and looked over them as he continued, "he is not dead, but in trouble."

His black eyes were fixed upon me over the edge of the papers, and he was watching the effect with great attention. Was he breaking the news to me kindly or not ? It was impossible to guess from his stolid countenance.

"In trouble," I repeated mechanically.

Mr. Westmair restored the cheques to their place, from which his cashier had swept them in his hurry to depart, leaned against the table, crossed his legs, clasped his thin hands toge-

ther, and once more looked at me with fixed intentness.

“In trouble by his own acts—and by his own weakness, and consequently there is no one to blame but himself for all the misery that he has brought about.”

“Poor father! Is he very ill—in very great trouble?”

“I don’t see that he deserves any pity from you—any more,” he added, after a moment’s pause—“than he deserves it from me.”

“Go on, sir.”

Mr. Westmair, having as he thought sufficiently prepared me, or having grown tired of his circumlocutory process of information, or having attended so far as he considered necessary to the injunctions of the young man who had beaten an unceremonious retreat, delivered the rest of his communication at one shot.

“Your father is in prison.”

There was a sudden singing in my ears, an upheaving of the floor towards the ceiling, a merry-go-round of the iron safe, the counting-

house window, and Abel Westmair, and then the mist was very dense and thick about me, as if a grand rush of the fog in Watling Street had streamed into the office, to hide me with my grief and shame from him who had told me all the news.

\* \* \* \* \*

I was quite certain that I had fainted and made a scene, some minutes afterwards. I hated scenes, and to have given way like this, and before this man, was humiliating to reflect upon, when the strength for reflection returned to me. I had always fancied that I was inclined to be firm, but this weakness convinced me that I was only a silly girl after all, unable to bear up against trouble. Should I ever bear up against real trouble again—such real, down-right trouble as this was?

“I shall be better in a minute,” I said, though my lips trembled very much, and I am sure were as white as paper; “it’s—it’s the long journey. I have been some time on board ship, and—and the journey was a fatiguing one.”

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"It's a considerable distance from the Cape to London," Mr. Westmair observed.

He had been bending over me along with his book-keeper, whom he had evidently called to my assistance. The cheques were all over the floor again, and at some stage or other of my convalescence I had knocked a water-bottle and glass from his hand, the contents of which were over the cheques.

"Do you feel any better now?" he inquired, after I had dreamily regarded him for a minute or two.

"I don't know; I—I think I do. I suppose that I fainted away?"

"Yes."

"Because—you told me that my father— Hadn't this gentleman better go now? I am much obliged to him, but——"

"You can go, Simpson," said Mr. Westmair. "Not that it matters," he added, after Simpson had retired, "for he knows the whole story, which he could have told you much better than I. I am not used to this kind of thing."

He said it in an aggrieved tone of voice, as

if he had been imposed upon very much that afternoon. He stooped, picked up his cheques, regarded their damp condition ruefully, and finally directed his attention to myself again.

“Will you not put your bonnet on?” he said; and I became conscious that that article of attire had been removed, and that my hair was rough and tumbled. I made myself as tidy as possible, and as my agitation would allow, keeping my eyes upon him, feeling that I should flinch no more, and be uncomfortable never again beneath his microscopic stare.

“My father in prison!” I said; “in prison for what?”

“For robbing us.”

“My father turn robber—oh, I don’t believe that! My father was honour itself, with all his faults, and do you tell me—do you dare to tell me that he is a thief?”

“I would certainly refrain from exciting myself in this way,” said Abel Westmair, coldly; “it unnerves you.”

“Tell me all that you know—or, rather, all that you believe against him.”

I daresay that I was unpleasantly peremptory in my tone, but I was so beset with the conviction that my father had been the victim of a cruel plot, that I did not study the feelings, if he had any, of my companion.

Mr. Westmair complied with my request. I was seated in the chair again, and he was leaning against the table in his old position. He spoke clearly and precisely, but betrayed no emotion at the story, or any further concern for my feelings. He was one of the great Westmairs, and I was one of the Kirbys—for two generations the Kirbys had been the servants of these people.

“Your father was a clever book-keeper, and an ingenious man at figures. When we made him cashier, and when a great deal of money passed through his hands, he turned his talents to a bad account, and robbed us systematically. We discovered it, and prosecuted him, as we should prosecute on principle anyone guilty of a breach of trust in this establishment. He pleaded guilty, and——”

“He pleaded guilty!” I cried.

“Yes—the facts were too clear for any attempt at refutation—and he was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment.”

“Where is he now?”

“In Holloway Prison.”

“God help him!—he was not guilty, I am sure he was not guilty, Mr. Westmair.”

Mr. Westmair’s face shadowed more at my persistence.

“That is a reflection on my word—on the honour of the house, Miss Kirby,” he said, slowly; “but you are suffering from a natural excitement. What do you think of doing? You have some money, I suppose, and friends in London, and—so on? Shall Simpson fetch a cab?”

“No, sir, I can walk,” said I, rising at this hint—“do not trouble yourself about me in any way. Of what sum were you robbed?”

“Eight hundred pounds.”

“And when was my father tried for the robbery?”

“The fifteenth of last September.”

“I—I must get a newspaper, or something,



and understand it for myself. I can't understand you," I added, abruptly, "and I do not want."

"Just as Miss Kirby pleases," he said, more coldly still.

"You never took his part, or thought that he might have been innocent; you believed every fact against an old servant at once. And yet his father before him had been in the firm."

"There was a Kirby here before your father," said Abel Westmair, "but we were not called upon to regard the matter from a sentimental or a dramatic point of view. We were robbed, and we found out the thief, that is all. If he had been our dearest and nearest friend, it would have been still our duty to repay a base act of ingratitude with the law's justice and might. There was no malice in the matter, and, so far as regards yourself, young lady, I, speaking for the firm, will add that we are sorry."

He said it with some dignity, perhaps with as much kindness as it was in his nature to evince, but I saw in him only a hard master who had had no mercy on my father. I hated the man;



I could have cursed him in my desolation, and for all the forced calmness which I had at last assumed. I hated him; but I was too proud to show that he or his words had any power to move me, and as my reiteration of a belief in my father's innocence appeared to vex him slightly, I expressed again my firm conviction that my father had been wronged.

He did not defend himself, or offer any further explanation; he regarded me with his old aggravating stolidity, and, as I moved towards the door, he opened it for me, standing thereat like a statue.

I was going out into the world, not knowing which way to turn, wholly uncertain concerning my next step, more bewildered by the strangeness of my position than I could have been aware at the moment, when I remembered that an all-important question had not been asked yet.

“And where's little Kate?”

The question leaped from me with spasmodic force, and he elevated his eyebrows and stared at me harder than ever.

“Where’s who?” he said.

“Little Kate—my sister?”

“I didn’t know that you had a sister. Really I have been quite in the dark as to your family connections.”

“And my father never spoke of her to you?”

“Not a word—why should he?”

“Great Heaven! that child is alone in the world then. And she is only seventeen! Where can she be?”

I went out of the counting-house, pondering on this mystery, on the impossibility of my finding her in the dark City of London, wherein I was myself submerged.

I went out of Westmair and Son’s with a heart that I thought was broken. My own position was precarious, but I had not time to think of it. Where was the child I had loved so much, and to whom I had been more like a mother than a sister after the real mother had died? She had been a wild, excitable, pretty girl, wayward, vain, fragile; she had been my chief anxiety in going away; what was she now in my coming back again? There were troubles

and cares on all sides of me, as I crept out of the office of the Westmairs into the fog, which had become very thick and black with the night. All seemed as impenetrable as my own life ahead, and there was no seeing a step before me.

I was beginning life again—life for myself, without a single friend to counsel me—and I had ten shillings and fourpence-halfpenny to begin it with !

## CHAPTER IV.

HERBERT WESTMAIR.

WITH a heart heavy-laden, I was proceeding down Watling Street towards St. Paul's Churchyard, when some one touched me on the shoulder. Through the mist I recognised the cashier whom I had surprised at his desk a short while since.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Kirby, for troubling you again, but has he told you?"

"Yes, he has told me all."

"Not unkindly, I hope? It's only my young uncle's way which is harsh and disagreeable," he explained, "for Abel is really not much more disagreeable than other people."

"I did not expect, or wish for, any kindness

from Mr. Westmair," I said, proudly—how hard I did try to be very proud with it all!—"He told me that he had put my father into prison, and I could not thank him for the information."

"I was afraid the news would almost be the death of you, Miss Kirby; I had not the courage to tell you myself."

"You are not a brave man, I perceive."

"I was not strong-minded enough for the task," he replied, "for you had come in full of hope, and I should have distressed you more by my explanation than Abel has done. I am a blunderer, upon my word. I can't do anything well, and my uncle has always his wits about him. I am about the worst fellow in the world to tell any other fellow bad news."

"Did you know my father?" I inquired.

"I was in the office a few weeks before he—before he met with his misfortunes."

"And you believe him to be guilty of this robbery?"

He stared hard at me for an instant, then he said,

"I am sorry to say, there is no doubt of

that. I think that he was led away, tempted, deluded, or something—at least, that was his excuse, when he begged Abel to forgive him.”

“And Mr. Abel Westmair could not see any reason for pardoning an old servant,” I said, sharply—I could only regard the matter from the Kirby point of view—“even supposing that my father had robbed the firm?”

“Supposing! Ah, yes.”

“I do not set my father down as a robber, because you and your uncle tell me that he is,” I cried. “You two I know nothing about, my father’s character and principles I have known all my life. Good evening.”

Mr. Westmair, taken aback by my sharpness, stopped to consider the position, recovered himself, appeared at my side again, and kept step with me, with a persistency that was annoying, despite the kindness which I believe was at the bottom of his attention.

“One moment,” he said; “but what shall you do now? Where are you going? Who are the friends to whom you can turn in this emergency?”

“ You appear to think that I am quite alone in the world,” I replied. “ What do you know of me, or of my position ?”

“ Well, I know more than you think.”

“ From whom ?”

“ From your father, who was afraid of your return.”

“ Tell me what he said,” I asked, eagerly ; “ did he speak of Katie ?”

“ Katie ?” he answered—“ who’s that ?”

“ My sister.”

“ I was not aware that you had a sister,” he replied. “ How singular ! Why did he not tell me that ? What an odd old fish !”

This last remark was not intended for my ears, but it made them tingle, nevertheless.

“ Why was my father afraid of my return ?” I said, gravely, probably sternly.

“ Simply for the reason that he could not see what was to become of you in London.”

“ Did he not think that I could take care of myself ?”

“ He thought that you had not a friend to look to ; and after his arrest, and before his

trial, he was always begging me or Abel to write to you, and prevent, if possible, your journey to England. He had had hopes of a great rise in life, and hence had written to you to join him, he told me. What rise in life he meant, Heaven knows; until the day of his arrest, he was in my berth, and that's not a particularly brilliant position, or calculated to excite an individual with an extraordinary prospect of coming greatness. I am wearying you?"

"No," I said; "go on."

"You were on his mind, and hence you got on mine," he continued, "for he gave up writing to Abel, and began to worry me instead. He thought more of you than his own ease, before he had two years for—but never mind that," he added, hurriedly—"and I was always receiving his assurances that you were weak and delicate, and would reach England totally unprepared, if it were too late to stop you. It would come at you, he said, like a death-blow."

"I am neither weak nor delicate," I remarked.

"Oh! that was another of his li—ideas," he



cried, quickly correcting himself; "but he said that a clumsy revelation would kill you, that you were a child whom a breath disturbed, and he so heaped up his instructions as to breaking the news, that I have been in a nervous fever ever since, lest one day or another you should walk into the office. And when you came in I did not think it was you, having expected a sickly, miserable, unhappy-looking woman. Guessing at last who you were, I was thinking of running round the streets to collect my ideas, when Abel dropped in and undertook a task for which I was unfitted, being—being as cowardly a beggar as it will be ever your fortune to meet, Miss Kirby. And that awkward piece of business over—this is Ludgate Hill, I think, and the fog's worse than ever here—I should be glad to assist you in any way that I can—I really should."

"May I ask your name?"

"Herbert Westmair, a nephew, or half-nephew, on the male side of the great family."

He said it a little ironically, laughing also at the greatness of his uncle; but I do not think that there was much envy in his merriment. He

appeared to me a man who regarded life carelessly, and took the good or bad fortune in it lightly enough. From what he had already implied he was evidently not a lucky man.

“Should I at any time require your assistance or advice, I will write to you,” I said.

I had answered more coldly than I had intended, for he had not injured me, and the desire to serve me was apparent ; but I could not be beholden for any favour to one of the Westmairs, however distantly removed. This was a man who had no doubt of my father’s guilt, and who simply pitied me because I was alone in the world, now that my father was a felon. He regarded me as a child, without any power to help myself; but I was strong at heart, which had not broken down with shame yet. Weary and heavy-laden I might be, but my old uncle had taught me constancy and faith. I was young, and did not know the world, or what the world was like. Perhaps I was all the better for that, who knows? I might feel very desolate, but I had not begun to despair.

I could not tell all this to Mr. Westmair ; I

was only anxious to get rid of him, and of those offers of help that were painful to listen to. I wanted to feel alone, to realise my position more acutely. Mr. Herbert Westmair was puzzled; he glanced several times at me as he walked by my side, and studied me out of the corners of his eyes.

“Write to me!” he said, at last, in reply to my last remark; “oh, it’s very doubtful if I shall remain at Watling Street. It does not suit me—it’s a beastly life.”

“I don’t think that I shall require your assistance, or that I shall be unable to help myself.”

“You have no friends in London?”

“My father told you that?”

“Yes; it was that fact which grieved him.”

“I wonder”—I stopped, fearing that I might hurt my companion’s feelings, and then, fancying that he had not cared for mine much, and doubting even if he had any, I continued, “I wonder what made my father think of you as a fitting confidant. He should have known it

was most unlikely that I should care to place trust in strangers."

"Exactly," was the reply, "but then your father was in a similar mess to yourself; he hadn't a friend either. I never saw such a helpless, cast-down old boy in my life. He was the drowning man, I was the straw, and so he made a grab at me."

"I don't understand," I said, very coldly now.

"I beg pardon; I have not put it in an elegant manner; I was always a slangy dog," he said, hurriedly, "but if there was anybody sorry for old Kirby—I beg pardon again—for your father, anybody inclined to persuade anybody else to let him off, kick him out, do anything but lock him up, it was myself."

"Thank you."

"Pray don't thank me. It was only to put an end to the bother. I told Abel it would save no end of bother if we let the affair blow over, but Abel was for duty, justice, example's sake, just as he always is. He's an honourable,

upright stick, that makes no allowance for the wind which blows the twigs the wrong way. And," he added, suddenly reverting to the subject which was oppressing him, "I told your father that if I could be of any service—if you were unfortunate enough to start before the next mail brought you Abel's letter, or your governor's, that you might in any way command me. He—he said that it was possible you might reach London without a penny in your pocket. By Jove, I can imagine nothing more awful than that! Without a penny! I remember when I was down to five pounds eight—that was not many years ago, either," he added drily—"and the sensation was devilish unpleasant."

"I have money enough for my immediate needs, and I have an uncle abroad to whom I can write," I said proudly.

"That's well. I am glad of that."

"I will not detain you any longer," I added; "you are coming out of your way——"

"Oh, don't mention it!"

"And," I concluded, "it is not likely that under any circumstances you can be of service to me, Mr. Westmair. I hope, with God's help, to be of service to myself."

I tried to say this very confidently—I said it confidently enough to deceive him, but at my position I shivered a little internally. Perhaps it was the fog at the foot of Ludgate Hill, where it was thicker than ever, that gave me a keener idea of isolation than I had experienced hitherto. But I was not going to show my companion that I was afraid of the world. Not I indeed!

I stopped, and he stopped also.

"I will wish you good evening again," I said.

"Which way are you going?"

"My own way," I answered calmly, "where I can think of all this by myself, and try to remember how many friends I had when I was here last."

"Oh, you had friends, then?"

"Yes."

To be sure I had friends! There was Katie,

and she could not be dead. Had I not had a letter from her by last mail?

“Come, that’s not so bad. I hope you will be able to find them,” he said. “May I shake hands?”

He offered his hand to me, and I placed mine within it for an instant.

“I am afraid you think that I have been very officious in this matter,” he said, “but I wanted to keep my word to your father as well as I could, and your—your position has perplexed me. It had nothing to do with me—ah! you are going to say that, perhaps—but still I thought that I might be of use, or that my mother’s advice might come in handy. Shall I give you my mother’s address?—you are sure to like her.”

I hesitated—a woman’s consolation in my sore distress would have been sweet and valuable, but I could not take it from a stranger in the streets—one of the Westmairs too, who had brought this awful trial upon me.

“Thank you—but there is no occasion that I should trouble any one.”



“Very well,” he said, again regarding me wistfully, almost doubtfully, “good-bye, then. I hope you will succeed in all your undertakings, and get the better of this—this disappointment very soon.”

“Thank you,” I said again.

I went away from him—I stepped into the road, intending to cross over to Fleet Street, when he once more took his place beside me, and to my surprise drew my hand through his arm.

“Yes, I know what you are going to tell me—I am a horrible fellow that will not go away,” he said, “but if you cross the road by yourself you will certainly be run over. There is always a great deal of traffic here.”

“I know this part of London by heart.”

“Very likely, but your knowledge is not worth much in the fog,” he replied. “Look out! that’s a horse’s head over your shoulder—Hold hard, will you?” he cried, to some one invisible in the clouds. “Can’t you see where you are driving?”



"Can't you and your gal get out of the road, stupid?" was the rejoinder of the driver of a Hansom cab.

Herbert Westmair laughed at this; and then apologised to me, as he suddenly remembered that I was not in a laughing humour.

"There, you see, I was of some use," he said, when we were at the corner of Fleet Street; and without waiting for my answer he darted back across the street, as if anxious to prove, by his precipitation, that it was not his intention to remain any longer in my company against my will. So sudden was his disappearance that I stood there for a moment surprised at my own loneliness; then I moved on towards Dorset Street, from which my father had last dated, and which had been home to me for years before I went to Pietermaritzburg. I had been cut adrift from all associations, and was alone at last. In the dense, dark world about me, there was only myself to depend upon. No, my heart was not broken, only heavy-laden—I have said so twice already. It sank

still more after the Westmair man had gone—  
but that was the fog. What a miserable night  
it was !

## CHAPTER V.

## THE OLD LODGINGS.

ALTHOUGH my position alarmed me, I don't think that I was quite selfish about it. I gave two thoughts to Katie to one for myself, for the child's strange disappearance, as it were, became one more sorrow to take into my keeping. What had become of her? Who was with her? Was she as helpless and alone as I was? and would it be possible to find her, to hear all the story, and to take some comfort from it, and from each other, brought together again after four years of separation? Surely I should find her. I was not a dull young woman—I had once heard my uncle Jeffery tell some one confidentially that I was quick-witted—and

I was not going to give up in a hurry the search for my sister. That seemed the task which I must commence in the best manner that suggested itself. It was a case of great emergency. At my father's old lodgings it might be possible, I thought, to take up the clue and follow it to the end. Katie would not have vanished away and left never a trace by which to discover her. She would have thought of my return, and of the trouble and grief that were to meet me. She had relied upon me; we had been always good friends. She would be counting every hour till I came back to her. But why my father had been anxious concerning me to Herbert Westmair, and had never mentioned Katie's name to him, or appeared to be anxious concerning her in any way, was a mystery that only my younger sister or my father could explain. It was beyond guessing at, and I tried to think it down—to set it aside—as I went along Bridge Street and past the hotels to Tudor Street and Dorset Street.

In the middle of Dorset Street, in apartments on the first floor of a very dingy house in this

very dingy neighbourhood, the Kirbys had fought their battle of life. Here Katie and I had been born, and mother had died; here had been home, and something of happiness in the midst of a long, long struggle to keep out of debt—a struggle that had failed and brought much anxiety, and my uncle's offer to take me away with him—growing such a big girl!—to Pietermaritzburg. Hence had dated all my experience of life. Down this narrow and grimy street, in the shadow of enormous gas-works, and within a stone's-throw of the river, I had lived sixteen years. As I turned the corner of Dorset Street the African settlement became a part of dreamland from which I had awakened. This was home, and I had never been away, it seemed. I went straight to the house wherein we had lodged, and where I used to wonder what would become of us all if the gas-works blew up. The huge gasometers were still there, and we had been blown up instead, and scattered such divers ways that to find each other again had become almost impossible. The street was dark and thick with fog; there were

no curious folk from up-stairs windows to look down upon me and speculate on my mission, as there would have been in the daytime amongst these colonies of lodgers. The chandler's shop and the coffee-shop had a glimmering of light in them, but their owners had shut the fog out by glass doors; and an organ-grinder was hard at *Miserere*, with two children, dirty but weather-proof, trying ineffectually to dance to it.

I knocked at the door of the old home, but the woman who opened it, and stood in the passage peering out at me, shading with her hand the candle that she held, was a slatternly woman whom I had never seen before.

"Mrs. Green—does she live here?" I asked.

"Mrs. Green's been dead these two years—dropsy," she added, as if the cause of Mrs. Green's decease might be of interest to me.

"Are you the landlady of this house?"

"My husband took house and furniture off Mrs. Green's hands afore she died, so I suppose I am," she answered, somewhat sharply. "Do you want anything particular?"

"Yes, I do. My name is Kirby."

“Oh! is it? Then I am very glad to see you,” she said, more sharply still. “Perhaps you’ll have the goodness to step into my parlour? My name is Simmons, which I daresay you’ve heard of.”

“No, I have not.”

The woman paused to consider my reply, as though it had puzzled her. Then, telling me to shut the door behind me, she led the way into the front parlour, which I knew so well. Katie and I had lived and slept in this front parlour for a week once—the week that mother lay dead up-stairs, when we were little children, and Mrs. Green had felt for us, stricken motherless so young. The furniture had not altered much; the glass with the rosewood frame over the mantelpiece I recognised, and an old-fashioned sideboard, with brass handles to its drawers, and six long spider legs, was so like an old friend that I felt for the nonce less desolate. When I looked at Mrs. Simmons, I drifted out to sea again. She was an angular, hard-faced, middle-aged woman, whom poverty had pinched into a bad temper, which nothing now

could cure. She was a miserably-clad, untidy being, who had left on the hearthrug an untidier specimen of human-kind in the shape of a grimy baby twelve months old, whilst she had responded to my summons. This baby was snatched at after setting the brass candlestick upon the table, and she proceeded to hammer its back as it lay across her lap, with a wild idea that she was soothing it to sleep. The baby cried instead, however, and she shook it for a moment, before re-commencing the hammering process with more energy.

“Sit down, marm, there’s a chair. What’s the matter with the child to-night, I don’t know, squalling and squealing like this, and no one to help me? It’s well that we poor people have patience, or we should die pretty quick of worry. So your name’s Kirby, is it?—related to the Kirbys who lodged here, and played me such a trick?”

“A trick!” I repeated. “Do you mean that my father, Mr. Kirby——”

“Oh! he’s your father, is he? Come, I’m glad of that, if you’ve called to settle what’s



owing, which I suppose you have, or you wouldn't be here to brazen it out with the rest of 'em. They was an ungrateful lot, but you ain't of that kidney, maybe. Lay still, do," she added to her baby. "I'm not at all surprised that mothers squelch their little ones sometimes, when their husbands are dead, and their sons are beasts, like mine, and go out drinking, and leave their mothers all the slavery at home. That's what it is."

And Mrs. Simmons, having shadowed forth her own grievances not indistinctly, thumped away again at her baby, who, after a second protest of a feebler description, condescended to shut its eyes. My position was not an enviable one, but there was news to be learned from this virago, and though I was afraid of her, I was not sorry that I had called.

"My father is in debt to you?" I inquired.

"Oh! you don't know that, then?" she asked ironically; "yes, that's very likely. Where have you been all this time?"

"I have been in South Africa. I have only returned this afternoon."

"Pity you hadn't stayed there."

I was of the same opinion myself by this time.

"Pity you hadn't stayed there," this waspish woman repeated, "if you come over to take up with such cheats as lived in my first floor. The lies they told about what they were going to do to make their fortunes, and pay off all they owed, was enough to bring the roof down on their 'eads, which, if it had, would have been a judgment that'd served them to the rights. They owed me thirteen pounds six shillings when they were sewed up. I don't know how the money went at all. I only know I got cheek for my share—that saucy young minx was your sister, I s'pose?"

"Katie?" I cried quickly.

"Ah, yes, Katie—that's her."

"What has become of her?"

"I don't know, and don't care. When your father was took to prison for thieving——"

"Oh, don't!" I cried, and my cheeks felt as if hot irons had been placed on them.

"Well, he was took, I s'pose, and a good take too, for what he was worth. If he'd been my

father, I should have been ashamed of him long ago, and not have come from Hafriker to ask him how he was. Thirteen pounds six shillings," she added, and in her excitement and absence of mind she began to hammer the baby again—"think of that to the likes of me, hard up as I am, with not a lodger in the house, and Dick—that's the son who pretends to support me—getting the sack next Saturday. If you could pay any of it, say a week or two off, good Lord! the help you'd be to me jest now!"

The eager look of the woman was pitiable to witness, and made me forget her want of consideration towards me. And, after all, why should she care for me or my position? What was I in any way but a member of the family that had run into her debt?

"I was not aware of this claim upon us," I said. "If in any way I can pay it, or pay something off presently, when I am settled and earning money for myself, I will. I give you my word."

"Ah! do you?" said the woman, phlegmatically. "I had your father's word, and a bad

one it was, your fine sister's word, and that was gammon, and now I have got yours. It's lucky to get the lot of the family's promises, but they butter no parsnips, you see."

"You—you were speaking of my sister," said I, in the most conciliatory tone that I could adopt—"what became of her after my poor father's arrest? She——"

I stopped, hoping that Mrs. Simmons would take up my cue.

"She walked out of the house as full of airs and graces as if her father had been made Lord Mayor of London, that's all," said Mrs. Simmons. "I didn't run after her, and beg her to keep the lodgings on, you may be sure. Glad enough was I to get shut of her at any price, and as for her coming back soon to pay my rubbishing rent, as she called it, why, I believe *that* just as much as I believe you. There!"

And with this humiliating peroration, she rose and walked from the room, with the baby in her arms. How long she was away, I do not know; I made no effort to withdraw. I fell into deep thought, or, rather, into a deep

stupor, that was something like thought, but wasn't, and when she came back without the child, I was sitting with my hands clasped, staring at the worn carpet, just as she had left me.

Mrs. Simmons stood by the door regarding me attentively after her return ; when I looked up, I saw that she was studying me, taking in every article of my attire, and mentally summing me up as she continued the analysis. Yes, hers was a very sour face, but I fancied that there was a trifle less acidulation in it when I met her gaze again.

"Did you say you come from Afriker this afternoon?"

"I reached London to-day."

"Expecting to find them here, as usual—lor'! the likes of that!"

"I thought that they would be easy to find," I answered, as I rose, "and I did not expect this. I am detaining you."

"Oh, I've got lots of time," she said, with an angry snort, "and wus luck is it!"

I thought that she had not had even time

enough to wash her face and hands, but Mrs. Simmons, in a lodgerless house, was evidently not busy. She had not expected company, her son was out, and there was no one to wash for.

"I think I see it all as plain as plain," said Mrs. Simmons suddenly; "their lies got over you too, and you came to London to take a share of their good fortun', and gave up a good place, per'aps. They served you out as well as a poor widder like me, did they—the unfeeling brutes?"

"Don't talk so," I said, more warmly; "my father and sister meant all for the best. How it happened that the worst has come, and that I meet ruin and shame where I had expected much of comfort, heaven knows—but they meant all for the best, I am sure."

"Well, it was a blessed rum way of showing it, and no mistake," said the woman, bluntly. "What are you going to do?"

"I am not certain," I replied, hesitatingly—"I don't see my way yet."

"Have you got any money?"

“Yes—a little.”

I did not say how little, but I added—

“Not enough to pay anything off my father’s debt—I wish I had.”

The woman tossed her head at this; she was evidently sick at heart of the Kirby protestations. Still she was a woman of business—a woman of the world—who made the best of the poor chances that presented themselves in her sordid sphere of life, and I was a chance to her in my small way.

“If you don’t know where to lodge,” she said, “there’s all the upstairs rooms empty, and you can have the back bedroom for two shillings, if you pay aforehand. I don’t trust no more, of course.”

I hesitated. It was a relief to know that there was a roof over my head offered for one night, but the woman’s manner was repellent, and the woman herself forbidding. Still it was a home in its way—it had been my home years before this, and I did not feel quite desolate and helpless therein. Here was rest—and I was tired and weak, and wanted time to turn



round and think what was to become of me, and what *had* become of Katie.

The woman seemed honest, though disagreeable, and by degrees her manner might thaw a little, and I might learn something more of the lodgers who had at least been two years with her, and had paid her whilst they were able. I might learn a great deal presently, if I were patient, and this woman was patient too.

"I think I will accept your offer for one night," I said, drawing out my purse.

"You'd better see the room fust," she said, more independently—"you mayn't like it."

She took the candlestick from the table, and led the way upstairs to the top of the house, to the very room where Katie and I had slept together last. The furniture was not changed, and the room was cleaner and brighter than I had bargained for. I knew the Bible pictures on the walls, until the mist came into my eyes and hid them from me. How many times had I told Katie of the stories which those pictures had attempted vainly in their garish colouring to illustrate, and she had lain by my side, with



her big blue eyes, full of wonder and awe, turning from me towards the prints. She was a golden-haired little child when those stories interested her, good and loving, and only somewhat spoiled by her mother, perhaps by me. Oh, my little Katie, what a time that is ago!—and why do I rain such bitter tears upon these leaves to think of it?

“We’ve the furniture, you see—as we have in the first-floor front,” Mrs. Simmons explained; “we took all we could get, but Tunks, the broker down the street, only offered me seven pounds for the lot last week, and we took it of your father as fifteen pounds off. For it was twenty-eight pounds six shillings, mind you, afore we had this heap of rubbish on our hands. But there it is,” she said, putting her candlestick on the drawers, “and clean it all is. I’ve been working at it to-day until I’m fit to drop, or my own place and myself would have been a bit tidier,” she added, as if suddenly awakening to a sense of the condition of her front parlour and herself; “and there’s the light, which you’re welcome to. Is that all the luggage

you've come from Afriker with?" she asked, regarding my small travelling-bag suspiciously.

"No—this is for immediate use," I said; "my box is left till called for."

"Simmons used to say never take in people without boxes, and see that there ain't stones in *them*," said the woman, thoughtfully; "but you're only here for one night at two shillings—payable aforehand."

"Oh! I beg your pardon—I had forgotten."

I opened my purse—which Mrs. Simmons attentively surveyed, and even stood on tiptoe to get a better view of—and paid her the two shillings for which she had waited.

"Thank you," she said, more graciously, for the mere fact of getting money from a Kirby was evidently overpowering. "Maybe you have not had any tea? It's easy to get a cup from the coffee-shop hard by. I do at this time of year—when Dick isn't coming home—it saves trouble and fire."

"If you would be so kind as that," I said. "Let me see, that will be three-halfpence more."

I remembered well the old Dorset Street prices.

"Yes, without anything to eat."

"I cannot eat anything, thank you."

I paid Mrs. Simmons three-halfpence, with which she immediately departed, leaving me alone in the old room. It was not home to me now, but it seemed so like home, that for a little while I was unnerved again, as I had been at the first glimpse of the pictures on the walls. Nothing seemed so far off in this place as it had been in the murky streets; and the figures of the past might glide in at any moment to save me from my isolation.

"This will not do, Faith," I said, before Mrs. Simmons came up-stairs again with the tea, but not before I had heard her advancing, in boots that flapped noisily as she walked; "you must keep strong, my child, till Katie's found."

## CHAPTER VI.

## IN THE FOG AGAIN.

I HAD pens, ink, and paper in my bag—much of the time on ship-board had been employed in the keeping of a little diary, which I had intended to send back to Uncle Jef—and after my tea I sat down to write a few letters. The mail for the Cape might leave to-morrow, and it was as well not to lose a moment's time in writing to my uncle, giving him some idea of my position, but telling him that I was very strong, that I trusted in myself and in Heaven's goodness to find Katie, and to be comforted presently for all the unlooked-for trouble by which I had been met. I was puzzled what address to give him, but I told him that in a

few days I would write again, with all the particulars that I had learned meanwhile, and I begged him not to be anxious concerning me. All would be well in time, I hoped.

My second letter was to my father, in the great Holloway Prison, to which City felons are drafted. I informed him that I was in London, cast down utterly by the news which I had received, and urged him to write at once, to the old address in Dorset Street, and give me Katie's address, if he were acquainted with it, which I prayed he was, which I thought he must be, and yet which I doubted, as though some mystery hung over Katie's absence that even he could not explain. My third letter was to the governor of Holloway Prison, enclosing my second, apologising for any informality in my method of procedure, trusting that the rules would allow my letter to be delivered to my father, and re-stating my case, and my strange situation, friendless and solitary, in the hope that he would be interested in the story, and do all for me in his power of which he was capable. I begged for an early permission to see my

father, and used all the special and earnest pleading at my command—it was not much—to attain that object.

A fourth letter completed my correspondence. It was an inspiration that prompted me to write it, or a reckless consciousness that I could not exert myself too much, or repeat my case too often, in order to awaken sympathy in those who could throw back the barriers between me and Jonathan Kirby, a prisoner at Holloway. I wrote to the Lord Mayor, as chief magistrate of the City of London, asking for an order to see my father, and repeating once more the facts of my sad case. Then, satisfied that I had made a good beginning—that I had not lost time, I went downstairs with the letters in my hand, and with my bonnet on, bent upon the mission of posting them at once. I had brought the light with me, and Mrs. Simmons, with the baby in her arms, and the baby crying its loudest, emerged in a bent attitude from the parlour, probably to make sure that I was not carrying out of the establishment some property that did not belong to me. Being one of the Kirbys

who had in times past served her very shabbily, it was necessary to be wary, and Mrs. Simmons was evidently a vigilant as well as a suspicious woman.

“Oh, you’re going out again,” she said.

“Yes, to post a few letters. I shall not be long.”

“You can be just as long as you like—we’re late people here ; Dick never comes home till half-past twelve.”

She looked gloomily at the letters once more.

“You seem to have plenty of friends, after all,” she said, with the old sullenness exhibiting itself.

“Two friends, I hope,” I said, showing the letters—“my uncle in Pietermaritzburg, and my father in prison. They were always good to me. The other two, I hope, will be friends in their way presently.”

“If you’re asking them for money, I’m sure they won’t,” said Mrs. Simmons, sententiously, as she turned towards the parlour again, pausing on the threshold to add, “You can leave the street-door ajar ; no one’s likely to rob me,



and if the baby's up when you come back, it will save my dragging it into the passage. I'm fit to drop to-night, with the child, as it is."

Thus enjoined, I left the door ajar, and went on towards Fleet Street and the post-office. The fog had increased in density and in depth of blackness with the night, and the street-lamps were no longer visible; it was as well that the neighbourhood was familiar to me, or I might have found some difficulty in Dorset Street. I was proceeding cautiously along the street towards the main thoroughfare at the top, when it occurred to me very suddenly and unaccountably that some one was following. Whether I had grown nervous with anxiety, or the night and the night's echoes were deceiving me, I was uncertain, but as I stopped to listen, footsteps behind me seemed to stop also, and when I went on again I heard heavy feet proceeding once more at a few paces distant. Mrs. Simmons might have thought it worth while to watch me, to make sure that some new Kirby trick was not being hatched against her peace; but I had left her with the baby, and



it was a man's-footfall, not a woman's, that was rendering me nervous.

"Some one going the same way as myself," I said, assuringly, and then I felt a throb of indignation as the new thought suggested itself that possibly Herbert Westmair was resolved upon not losing sight of me, whether I wished it or not. I was glad when I was in Fleet Street, though I did not regard my return to Dorset Street with complete satisfaction. I was even thinking of taking a circuit back along Fleet Street, and round Bridge Street and Tudor Street, in preference to returning by the same route, and was deliberating upon the expedient after I had posted my letters in a huge pillar-box, which had been a London improvement since my residence abroad.

I was in doubt, when the watcher—I am sure that it was he who had been watching—came straight towards me and peered into my face, startling me with his haggardness and ghastliness. It was a face that I had not seen before, and the sunken grey eyes were overshadowed by two great bushy eyebrows. It was a face I

did not like—an uncommon, fierce, strange, sickly face which stereotyped itself upon me.

“Miss Kirby, isn’t it?” said a voice, tremulous with eagerness; “you have come then, Katie, as you promised.”

## CHAPTER VII.

MRS. SIMMONS HAS HER DISLIKES.

COULD this be a coincidence, altogether a dream from which I should awake over my letter-writing, or was it a reality born of my prayers that Katie might be restored to me? "If the last, Heaven has been very good to me," I thought, in that simple pious way, out of which, alas! I have grown a little.

I leaned against the pillar-box, looking at my questioner's white face, the expression of which wavered as I looked, and became confused.

"Katie!" I gasped forth. "What do *you* know of Katie Kirby?"

"I—I beg pardon—it's a mistake," the voice

said huskily. The man backed and grew fainter in the fog, like a figure in a phantasmagoria, and then vanished suddenly. Two or three wild steps forward brought me to the closed shutters of a shop, against which a burly policeman was standing, to whom I appealed in my anxiety.

“Some one passed just now—I was speaking to him—which way has he gone, policeman?”

“I don’t know—I haven’t seen anybody. Have you had your pocket picked, miss?” he inquired.

“No, no.”

“Ah, that’s lucky. There’s lots of light fingers and light heels about to-night.”

I went down Salisbury Street thinking of all this, wondering what it all meant, inclined once more to believe that it had been an odd hallucination born of a long day’s fatigue. I reached the house in Dorset Street, and was not watched in my return, so far as I was aware.

The street-door was as I had left it at Mrs. Simmons’s suggestion; I closed it behind me, and then looked in upon my landlady sitting in

the parlour still, with the baby stiff and rampant in her arms. There was a most unamiable expression on Mrs. Simmons's countenance; the baby had tried her temper very much in my absence, and there was no sleep in it.

"The baby is still awake, then?" I ventured to say.

"Oh—awake—yes," she answered crossly; "it's always awake when it ought to be asleep—as contrairy as life itself."

"Shall I hold the baby for a little while?"

The offer was a startling one to Mrs. Simmons. She was in the middle of an extraordinary gymnastic performance, that consisted of tilting herself from the back to the front legs of her chair, which not being a rocking one, or in any way contrived for the purpose, threatened at every movement to collapse with her; she paused in mid-air to consider my proposition. I blushed at her steady survey of me. I was fond of babies, though I preferred them less gritty, and babies as a rule took to me, but it was only with the hope of learning more news of my family that I had volunteered my services, and I feared that my

artfulness was apparent on my guilty countenance.

"You can have her for a minute or two, if you like," Mrs. Simmons said; "come in and sit down."

I complied with her request, and Mrs. Simmons put the baby into my arms. It was a pretty child, despite a black smutch from the roots of its hair to the tip of its dubby nose; and after a long stare at me, it reached out two little fists towards the brooch at my neck, and burst into twenty dimples.

"She seems to fancy you," said Mrs. Simmons, after a while, "and that's saying a great deal, as she won't go out of my arms if she can help it. She's a dreadful worrit."

"From which you would not care to be spared, I dare say?"

The sour visage softened somewhat.

"Well, no; though when my temper's up—and I'm rather shortish—I do wish orful things about her. I daresay," she said reflectingly, "it would be a mussy if she were tooked—I often think that of baby gals with no father, or

no mother, or not much chance ahead of 'em, and I've thought it of her. But she's post-humorous, you see—she was born a fortnight after Simmons was buried, and six had died afore her, and for her to live was funny. Nobody expected it," she went on, becoming loquacious over her infant, "for she was born a mite that you could put in a quart pot, but she throve after the first five weeks like a good one, and then got dreadful bad with whooping-cough, which brought her down to nothing. The doctors said that change of air might save her, and though I had no money, and your people was serving me out shameful, I gave her all the change I could. I walked her seven or eight miles into the country—sometimes to Tottenham, sometimes t'other way to Willesden—day after day, and then seven miles back again, and so I think I saved her by degrees. Of course I let the house go anyhow, but that didn't matter to me then."

Mrs. Simmons rose several degrees in my estimation after her confession. In a woman who could adopt these novel means to afford

her baby change of air, who could struggle on day after day in the hope of saving her child, who gave up work, and "let the house go anyhow," as she termed it, in the mother's strong yearning to preserve one little life unto herself, I thought I saw a fair trait of character underlying much of the ruggedness of her every-day aspect.

"What is her name?"

"Kate," she said, sullenly and slowly.

"Kate—Katie—after——"

"Yes, after your sister," was the information begrudgingly vouchsafed to me. "I was ill in bed, and it fretted me to think the baby might die without being christened, and one day your sister came in, and told me that Dick and she had taken it round the corner to church, and had had it christened Kate. I was cross at first, but they meant it well, I s'pose, though Dick had no right to ask that gal to be my baby's godmother, without speaking of it to me. She a godmother, indeed! I told 'em my mind, though I wasn't sorry afterwards, thinking that



the child must die, which she didn't. Mind she she doesn't scratch herself with that brooch of yours. I wish you hadn't taken her, she'll be awake for hours now you've roused her," she added.

"She was awake when I came in," I said. "And so this is another Katie! Was my sister fond of her?"

"Not a bit. She was never fond of anybody but herself," said Mrs. Simmons, "and never thought of anybody but herself, except now and then in a spasm, when she couldn't help it."

"Oh! I hope you're wrong—I know you are," I cried; "she was impatient, perhaps a little wilful, spoiled a great deal by mother and father, but she was always warm-hearted."

"How old was she when you went away?"

"Thirteen."

"Ah! I didn't know her then," was the answer, "but I can't abide her now."

"Why not?"

"Oh! don't ask me."

"You have some particular reason for your dislike of her, I think."

"You're sharp," Mrs. Simmons remarked sententiously; "p'raps I have."

"I wish that you would tell me what it is."

"That wouldn't do you any good, nor me neither, though, mind you, I don't say as how I have. There's no more accounting for one's dislikes than one's likes, and I don't like her well enough to wish to see her, that's all. See her again, I hope I never may."

I endeavoured to lead round the conversation to my father, and to acquire from Mrs. Simmons some details as to the cause of his imprisonment. Herbert Westmair had spoken of my father's having fallen into bad hands, of a studied series of defalcations, of Jonathan Kirby having gone wrong altogether; but Mrs. Simmons could not enlighten me as to any antecedents.

"They told me at Westmair's, this afternoon, that he had altered very strangely," I said; "if his mind were affected by his position, it might

account for much that is at present inexplicable."

"He was always the same, so long as I knew him," Mrs. Simmons replied, "sly enough for fifty people. He did suddenly begin to talk big, and to lord it over me—he was going to be rich, and pay everybody, with lots of interest—and then they came here one night and took him off to prison."

"Was Katie at home then?"

My thoughts would come round to her, and I bore up against my landlady's disparaging reflections for the sake of the information that I might be able to obtain. After all, I had learned nothing.

"Oh, yes, Katie was at home."

"How did she bear it?"

"She went on about the family disgrace, and cried like anything, and said she'd drown herself for shame. But she got over it wonderful quick, which was a mussy in its way."

"You speak bitterly," I said; "I wish that you would tell me——"

"I have nothing to tell about her," Mrs. Simmons said, before I could complete my adjuration; "it's no use your worriting about your sister, I haven't time to think of everything that she said and did while she was here. Why can't you let her rest? She didn't like me, and there wasn't any love lost."

"And you have no idea where she is now?"

"Thank goodness, no!" was the quick reply. "Have you done with my baby?"

"She's quiet now. I fancy that she is sleepy."

"Not with all this talking in her ears," said Mrs. Simmons, taking her baby from my arms. "I'll try her in the other room again."

Mrs. Simmons departed, and I was left alone to consider if I had discovered anything by my patience. No, there was not a trace of Katie Kirby. I had not even found a clue to her character, for the hard woman who had left me was unjust, as are all people with strong prejudices. I thought myself to sleep, born of a

long day's fatigue; but it was a feverish slumber, which told of much excitement at my heart, for all the composure that I had struggled to maintain. I passed into an awful dreamland. My father was in a dungeon, chained to the wall, as in the old prison days of which I had read in books of martyrs, and I was listening to his shrieks for mercy, and his curses on those who had punished him for a crime of which he had been the victim, not the perpetrator. They were going to torture him, and the Westmairs, father and son, were scowling from an open doorway high up in the wall; whilst over their shoulders was the mocking face of Herbert Westmair, the man who had taken care of me in the fog that evening. Katie and I were together, both imploring the Westmairs for mercy, and Katie had proofs of my father's innocence, which proofs his persecutors saw at last, and came down a flight of stone steps towards us to wrench from our hands at any cost. We were cowering amongst the straw in a corner of the cell, shrieking for help as they advanced, and

my father was struggling madly to break his chains and dash to our deliverance, when I awoke with a scream, and with that sickness and heart-throbbing common to such nightmare horrors.

Where was I? Had I passed from one bad dream to another? Who was this man standing on Mrs. Simmons's hearth-rug, with his hands in the pockets of his trousers, and a cap pulled closely over his forehead! He had been regarding me with immense interest, for his mouth was half open, and his eyes protruding from his head. I was more of a surprise to him than he was to me. After I had stared at him for a few seconds, he said in a thick voice—

“Where's mother?”

“I don't know,” I answered. “I have been asleep, I think.”

“You've been dreaming badly,” he said. “I can't make it out, but I do that kind of thing myself—often, too. I suppose you are—who are you, did you say?” he said, suddenly adopting the interrogative form as more convenient to himself.

"I am lodging here for a night," I replied.  
"Are you Mrs. Simmons's son?"

"Yes, I am," he answered. "Where's mother?"

"Putting the baby to sleep."

"She's always putting the baby to sleep," he muttered in an aggrieved tone.

He was as cross-tempered as his mother, I thought, as he walked across the room, and lumped himself down into the first vacant chair, where he remained till Mrs. Simmons's entrance. But before Mrs. Simmons re-appeared, I had recognised him. At the first sight of him, when he had seemed to be the continuation of my dream under another aspect, the pallid face had struck me as a something that I had seen before, and a second glance assured me that it was he who had called me Katie when I was standing at the letter-box in Fleet Street. There was no mistaking the unhealthy look of the man, the grey sunken eyes gleaming from a face strangely white, or the heavy black eyebrows lowering above them, although the eagerness of expression which had startled me was

replaced by a stolidness of aspect that bordered on stupidity. Was I approaching closer to the solution of one mystery? I thought so, and I was very glad.



## CHAPTER VIII.

DICK SIMMONS.

I CONTINUED to regard Mr. Simmons furtively, preparing my course of action meanwhile. He had got over his curiosity concerning me, and was sitting with his hands in his pockets, and his shoulders above his ears, a masculine distortion. He was a plain man, with a face very old-looking for his years, which, I learned afterwards from his mother, numbered two-and-twenty. He seemed to me that night to be quite thirty years of age, and, like Abel Westmair, to be carrying his years but indifferently well.

He was dressed badly, but there had been an

effort at some time or other of the day to smarten himself up. The cravat was of a dazzling blue, but the tie had got round to his ear, and disclosed in the process a soiled and crumpled shirt-front; the coat was black and almost new, and the trousers were of that thick, heavy velveteen common to the lower classes who have hard work to do, and plenty of it.

He had appeared at first anxious to ascertain my name, or the motive for my presence in the house; but that feeling had died away, or been quickly suppressed, and he was sitting before me stolid and inanimate, with his cloth cap, more suitable for a boy than a man, pulled tightly over his head.

"I have seen you before this evening, Mr. Simmons?" I said.

He gave a perceptible writhe in his chair, as if to accommodate himself to various angles therein, before he answered me.

"Yes," he replied at last, "you have."

"You took me for my sister—for one who used to lodge in this house?" I continued.

He was silent for some minutes. I thought

that it was his intention not to answer me, when he said, after swallowing something in his way of utterance—

“Well, I did.”

He was a man evidently on guard, and not to be led into a long discussion ; he even seemed a man who was afraid to trust himself to any rigid questioning, he paused so long to consider his best method of reply.

“You were waiting for my sister,” I said, “and you expected to meet her to-night?”

To this question he did not answer, and after he had sat silent and sheep-faced for as long a period as my patience would allow, I said—

“Am I right or wrong, Mr. Simmons?”

“Oh, you’re right enough,” he said, with a sullenness that proved him to be his own mother’s son.

“You know where Katie is, then?” I cried ; “I am very, very glad ; you have saved me from much anxiety, though why she should trust to you, I—I don’t know, of course. Please tell me where to find her, and I will go at once. I could not rest in this house, knowing that she

was close by. And she is very near—I am sure of it!”

My excitement appeared to bring more sense, or more caution, to Mr. Simmons; he took his hands from his pockets, rested them on the arms of his chair, half rose, then sat down again, regarding me intently all the while, and still as if he were afraid of me.

“I don’t know,” he said—“I really don’t know where your sister Katie lives. I wish to God I did!” he added, with a sudden vehemence that led me to recoil from him.

“You were waiting for her?”

“Yes, because—because she said——”

“Said what? Why should there be any mystery about it, anything to be ashamed of, or to keep from me? Said what?”

“She said—she promised,” he explained, after another gulp down of something in his throat, “that she would, some fine night, come back to me—to us again—just as she used to do, you know; that I might look out for her in this street; that she didn’t bear me malice, but good-will; and that if I waited she would come,

and show me she was just the same as ever. And so night after night, until half-past eight o'clock by St. Paul's"—he was very precise as regarded the time, it seemed—"I have waited; but she doesn't come. She has fine friends now, and we're poor poverty-stricken wretches; but if she has a better friend than Dick Simmons in all the world, why, strike me dead, that's all!"

It dawned upon me that Dick Simmons had been drinking since I had posted my letters in Fleet Street; it suggested itself to me that he was a weak fellow, who had fostered a silly fancy for my sister, until it had almost turned his head, and led him perhaps, poor wretch, to drink. When he dashed his cap upon the floor, and kicked it afterwards across the room by way of emphasis to his remarks, I had no doubt of both my suppositions, and the few tears in which he surreptitiously indulged only strengthened my conviction; I thought more of Katie than of him, however.

"How do you know that Katie has fine friends?"

"I—I don't know," he replied, after a moment's hesitation; "how should I know anything for certain? She wouldn't come here to say anything about them; she wouldn't take any trouble about me, a man at the gas-works over the way till Saturday, when he gets the sack, and serve him damned well right. But she has better than friends we are; oh! yes, lots of 'em—she'll find that out in time."

He struck his hand upon the wooden elbow of his chair with a force that must have hurt him, though he regarded it not in the passion which had suddenly replaced his grief and weakness. The raised tones of his voice brought his mother from the next room into the front parlour.

"Don't holler like that, now the baby is off," she said sharply. "Here, what's the matter? Hold up your head, do."

Mrs. Simmons stretched forth her bony hand, took her son by the blue cravat, and held his head back over the chair, as though she was going to shave him, till he resisted the indignity and wrenched himself from her clutch, with an angry oath or two.

"Ah! that's the way," said Mrs. Simmons, ironically, "that's wus and wus, jest as I said it would be. You can swear at your own mother now—my boy who went to Sunday-school as teacher only twelve months back, and liked the work of Bible-teaching too. Don't mind him, Miss Kirby; he's only crying drunk as usual. This happens every night; if you were going to stay here, you'd get as used to it as I have."

"I'm not drunk," muttered the son.

"Oh! no, of course not. *Now*," she cried, turning suddenly upon me, with her face as pale as her son's, and her eyes ablaze with a passion fiercer than his own had been, "you can make out why I hate your sister. It seemed to puzzle you a bit—does it still?"

"I can't make it all out," I answered. "I may guess at much, but I know nothing."

"What does he put on his Sunday coat and his best cravat for, on a week-day like this, the silly Johnny?" she asked.

"Don't call me a silly Johnny," muttered her son.

"What for, Miss Kirby," reiterated Mrs. Sim-



mons, "but that he fancies himself in love with your sister, and that she's coming to meet him—she who cares about as much for him—as he's worth," she added, with a bitterness that made even Dick Simmons shrink, "or as I care for her, and you know what that amounts to."

"Yes, I know that," I answered.

"Ah! but you don't know how that boy of mine has been served," she cried more fiercely still; "driven the wrong road, from the Sunday-school to the gin-shop; laughed and sneered at by a flirting, vain, trumpery hussy, who thought she'd try and make a fool of Dick, just to keep her hand in. I didn't think Dick was such a fool as that then, or that a chit of a girl could turn him round her little finger as she did, making game of him all the time. She's turned him into that thing!" she said, her vindictive disparagement again causing her son to writhe perceptibly—"a curse to himself and to his mother, and I wish her dead for it—there!"

"She has done you no harm, has she?" asked Dick.

"If this isn't harm, what is?" she said.



“What have you made of home ever since your whining and whinnicking after that girl? Isn’t it all a part and parcel of the wretchedness which has flopped down on us? Haven’t I come to taking money of her sister, rather than starve? You fool! Take the light and go to bed. You’re not fit to sit here.”

“I think I’ll go to bed,” said Dick, with intense gravity. He rose, moved unsteadily towards the table, reached a shaking hand for the light, and shambled out of the room, and upstairs noisily. Mrs. Simmons commenced striking lucifers against the mantelpiece, as her son had left us in the dark by his method of retreat. When she had lighted a second candle, she stooped forward suddenly, and brought her face so close to mine that she startled me.

“Are you crying?” she asked.

“No, not crying exactly,” I answered. “I am overwrought, I suppose; this has been a dreadful day to me.”

“Oh, yes; I suppose it has. But *she* is not worth crying about, you know.”

“I would rather not mention her name again

in this house," I said calmly; "please don't say anything more about Katie."

"Don't you want to think of her any more, then?"

"To think of her—yes, and to believe the best of her," I said, dashing away with a hasty hand the tears which had betrayed me; "for she has done no harm to anyone, I am sure. It is not likely that you or your son could understand my sister."

"Oh, lor!—oh, indeed!" said Mrs. Simmons, ironically.

"I will go to my room," I said.

"All right," said Mrs. Simmons, shortly, "you know where it is."

"Yes."

"You can take this light," and Mrs. Simmons pushed it towards me with no gentle hand; "I shall be striking lucifers all night, at this rate."

When I had bidden Mrs. Simmons good night, and had reached the parlour-door, she said in the same harsh tones—

"You've had nothing to eat since I've knowed you. Ain't you going to eat?"

"I could not touch anything yet."

"You'll be ill if you go on like that," she muttered. "I've a biscuit or two that——"

"No, thank you. Good night."

"Oh ! good night. Do as you like, it's nothing to me."

I went up the stairs slowly—they seemed more of a difficulty to mount than they had been—and I stopped to reflect upon the possibility of my falling ill in this house, as Mrs. Simmons had hinted at.

"I shall be better to-morrow," I said to myself, assuringly—"better able to get away from Dorset Street. I can't stop here."

I was shuddering at the prospect of a long stay in this uncongenial atmosphere, when Dick Simmons, in his shirt-sleeves, came out on tip-toe to the first landing-place, at which I had arrived.

"I thought it was you," he said huskily ; "I've been waiting for you."

"Ha ! to tell me where she is."

"No. How should I know that? What makes you think I do?" he rejoined.

“I had a hope that you knew.”

“That’s nonsense—I wish I did. But I’ve been waiting and listening for you.”

“Why?”

“To tell you not to mind the old girl downstairs; she means well—no one better—but she’s an awful temper. You mustn’t mind,” he added, laying a finger on my arm in his tipsy confidence, “all that she has said about Katie—a berrer girl than Katie does not breathe! Not her fault a bit, she’s too high-spirited for anything of the sort. All my fault—’pon my soul, all my own doing—a silly Johnny!”

He quoted his mother’s animadversion, as though it were an original comment upon himself, as he backed towards his room, nodding at me gravely. I was glad that he had defended my sister, even in this eccentric fashion; it set her in a better light, and I read only a young man’s folly and a pretty girl’s fun. Katie had been always full of fun—God bless her!—and if all that had been jest for her had been sober earnest for poor Dick Simmons, why, that was

Dick Simmons's fault, and no one would be more sorry than Katie when she knew the truth.

## CHAPTER IX.

## AT HOLLOWAY.

I WAS ill the next day, just as Mrs. Simmons had prophesied that I should be—so sick and ill, so far beyond all power of my own to leave my bed, that I was weak enough to fear I might die in the thick of the mystery which shadowed the Kirbys. It was a thought that robbed me for a while of the little composure that was left; it was hard to think of dying in that room, with Mrs. Simmons scolding me for the trouble that I was to her—with no father, no Katie, no Uncle Jef—not a single face that had ever looked kindly into mine.

But I did not die, and Mrs. Simmons did not scold me. On the contrary, when that lady found me out, after shaking her head and say-

ing, "I told you so"—which assertion appeared to relieve her very much—she came out in such bright colours that they have never wholly faded from me since. They were good wearing colours, such as poor women display at the fore very frequently, when there is a chance for these undemonstratives to "show off."

Mrs. Simmons was positively kind. She brought me tea and dry toast, and, though I was not grateful at the time, she harassed me into taking them, and, not till that operation was performed, was I aware that she had put brandy in my tea.

"It's the best thing for weakness. There! catch hold, and finish it."

"Do you think I shall be better now?"

"Yes—presently. Try and sleep a bit again, and don't fidget yourself more than you can help."

"I'll try and sleep."

"Blest if you're little more than a child yourself," she said. "How old are you?"

"Twenty."

"I thought it wasn't more. You talk of

looking after *her* indeed—the likes of it?” she muttered; “why, she’s as old as you are! And you’re precious like her, too. I wonder I didn’t see it earlier; if I had you wouldn’t have been here, though.”

“Pray, don’t begin again.”

“Never mind—I didn’t mean to say anything, with you a-laying there—not quite such a brute as that, I hope, though things *are* going the wrong way, and rile a body dreadful. But there, there, there!” said Mrs. Simmons, rapidly, “what’s it to you?—what’s it to anybody in a hundred years’ time?”

She went away, and I dropped off to sleep—or rather to a repetition of the dreams by which I had been beset all night, and which had begun in the front parlour of Mrs. Simmons’s house. I woke up several times during the day, always in wonderment as to where I was, and who was the thin-faced woman looking down upon me with something in her hands that I was either to eat or drink, and from which I begged hard to be mercifully spared. It was not till the next day, which was Sunday, that I was better.



I was sitting at my window when Mrs. Simmons came in, and raised her arms aloft in her surprise at finding me dressed for the day.

“Come—that’s brave!” she said; “but are you strong enough?”

“I am only a little weak,” I replied, “but I shall not give you any more trouble, I hope.”

“I hope not too,” she said; “for you’ve enough to bear without falling ill. You’re sure you are strong?”

“Yes—quite sure.”

“Then there’s a letter—I kept it back last night because you were too ill to be bothered—and it was too late to do anything.”

“Oh, why did you do that?” I cried, reproachfully.

I opened the letter impatiently. It contained a few formal lines from the City magistrates, informing me that, under the peculiar circumstances of my case, an order was enclosed for my admittance to Holloway Prison on Monday morning next, between twelve and one. I had softened the heart of some one in authority, at least.

"I am very glad," I said.

"What about?"

I informed Mrs. Simmons of the cause for my exultation.

"I don't see much to be glad about in that," she answered.

How the Sunday passed, in my eagerness and impatience to be stirring, to be doing something to break down the barriers by which I seemed surrounded, I hardly knew. I was not well enough to go to church in the morning, and though I tried to read my Bible—as Uncle Jef would have wished me—there came between me and all meditation the expectation of the morrow, and the uncertainty of what that morrow might bring forth.

I did not see Richard Simmons in the morning. He had not cared to meet me in his sober moments, his mother informed me, but had gone out early, she did know where—she did not care where, she added, with a quick jerk upwards of her chin. Very likely he had gone away to make the expenses less, now that he was out of work and short of money, she

thought. He was "sacked" last Saturday, and must shift with better people than ever he was. But despite this assumed indifference to his welfare, the mother kept her eyes towards the street, and ran once with alacrity to the window, when she thought that she saw him passing on the other side of the way. Mrs. Simmons was clad in a rusty brown silk for Sunday wear, and was altogether neat and tidy. The baby was presentable, and Katie's godchild and I were very good friends by tea-time. I boarded and lodged with Mrs. Simmons, after having told her that I was short of money, and must presently fall back upon the contents of my box for payment of the expenses that I had incurred in Dorset Street, unless—and here I paused, and she looked at me over the baby.

"Unless I settle with you now, so far as——"

"I'd rather wait," she answered.

"You preferred money in hand when I first came, and I have no right to break your rules, or expect to be trusted, Mrs. Simmons."

"I'll try and trust you," she said drily, "though you are a Kirby."

I went to church in the evening, and Mrs. Simmons volunteered to accompany me.

“Once a week I always go,” she said, “and my neighbour comes in to mind the baby till I get back again. But p'raps you'd rather go by yourself,” she added huffily; “you've more the looks of a lady than I have, and we don't make a pair.”

“I would rather go with you.”

“Dick went with me once reg'lar, but he's given all that up.”

She repressed a sigh as she went to the door to admit her neighbour, to whose services she had already referred. To the mother's surprise, Dick Simmons had not given it all up, however—there he was sitting in the free seats, grave, quiescent, and attentive. He saw us, and rolled his little grey eyes into their corners at us; but he did not return to Dorset Street after church was over. He came in late. His mother and I had expected a repetition of the Friday night's behaviour, but he was as sober as a judge when he returned.

“Good evening, Miss Kirby. I've had all

the supper I want," he said to his mother, after a glance at the bread and cheese which had been set aside for him.

"Where have you been, Dick?"

"For a walk, that's all."

"I wasn't sorry, Dick, to see you at church again."

"Ah!" was the careless reply; "where was I to go?"

He relapsed into taciturnity after this, and no one attempted to disturb him. Once or twice I caught his gaze directed to myself, as if he were studying me, or comparing me with Katie.

The baby's wailing in the next room having taken the mother to the rescue, he said to me in a quiet, almost a refined manner—

"Do you intend to make a long stay here, Miss Kirby?"

"No—only till to-morrow, I think."

"Indeed. What do you mean to do after to-morrow?"

"I hardly know. I see my father to-morrow, and he will advise me."

"Your father—at Holloway prison?" he asked, in evident surprise.

“Yes,” I replied; “I have a hope that he will know my sister’s address.”

He looked eagerly at me again, seemed about to speak, altered his mind, and directed his attention to all that was left of the pattern of a Kidderminster carpet. He was very thoughtful the remainder of the time that he favoured me with his company. When he said good night, he added, “Remember me to your father in the morning, Miss Kirby,” as he went out of the room.

On that memorable morning when I saw my father first in prison, I caught sight of Mr. Simmons’s white face watching me from the first-floor window as I went away. He seemed interested in me and my movements, and when I stepped into a Holloway omnibus, I looked round half fancying that he might even think it worth his while, and for some inexplicable reason, to follow me. But I did Richard Simmons an injustice, and my new life had already rendered me more than commonly suspicious.

When I found my way to the prison where City offenders are drafted after their conviction,

I felt my heart sink ominously ; and when, after much critical inspection of me by the warder on duty, I was allowed to enter a little room, whilst the great gates clanged behind me, I felt very much as if I were going to be locked up for good myself.

In this apartment, bristling with cutlasses and pistols on the walls, my magistrate's order to visit Jonathan Kirby was inspected by the warder, and my name requested to be written in a book that was open for the purpose. That formality having been gone through, I waited until another officer took charge of me across the courtyard, into the great hall, up the stairs trodden by many as forlorn as I was, and into a small room, where I waited for a little while, until the officer re-appeared and beckoned me.

"You can see him now."

"Thank you," I murmured.

I tried to keep very firm, to walk very steadily into one of a series of compartments fenced by wire, and with wire above my head, having before it a second series of compartments to match, separated from each other by a narrow



strip of neutral territory, where an officer took his stand, a silent witness of our interview. There was a click of a lock, that seemed to spring back something in my heart along with the wards, and then there entered, with a forced briskness of step, into the compartment facing me, the man I had come to visit, and whom in the streets I should not have recognized—my father with his hair all white as I had never seen it yet, with a pinched and sallow face, and an attenuated frame, clad in a suit of grey too big for him—my poor father, God help him!

He had prepared himself for this meeting; he had rehearsed the effect in his cell, perhaps, and was more composed than I had hoped to find him. He spoke as if from behind a mask, and there was a convulsive twitching of the muscles of his face that changed him very much, until he recovered himself, and gazed steadily from his cage across at me.

“Well, Faith,” he said, “so you have come to see me, then!”



## CHAPTER X.

## THE PRISONER FOR FELONY.

I DID not reply at once to my father's salutation. It took time to recover from the effect of his appearance—from the shock which the change in him had given me. This old man in the grey suit I had not expected to see; I had not thought of the change that four years might have brought to him, and yet four such years of mental anxiety and personal shame might have bent the form and blanched the hair of men stronger and younger than he. My father had never been a strong man, but I had not dreamed of his breaking down like this.

“You are well, I hope,” I stammered forth at last.

“Not very well,” he answered; “as well, perhaps, as the rules will permit me to be. The air and the fare are against my getting very strong.”

“Oh!—yes.”

We had not assumed our natural positions towards each other; it was strange, but it seemed to me that four years of separation had even brought about an odd kind of reserve between us, unless it was the presence of the prison warder that checked all natural demonstration. Of the cause which had placed him in prison, I did not like to be the first to speak, and already I saw—or fancied that I saw—a desire on his part to avoid it. He would declare presently that he was innocent, and that by some cruel train of circumstantial evidence, telling and forcible but false, he had been brought to suffer for the guilty.

“How did you leave your uncle?” he asked in clearer and more precise tones.

“Well and happy.”

“A little always made Jef happy,” he replied; and then he leaned against the wire-

work and coughed violently for a few moments.

"I have caught cold in this wretched place," he said to me; "it's full of draughts, and the early rising at this time of year does not agree with me. Please God, I shall be in the infirmary soon. That is the prisoner's *summum bonum*, Faith."

"Speak English, Kirby," said the warning voice of the official, "and then I can understand you."

"All right, sir," replied my father, deferentially; "*summum bonum* was no reflection upon the diet, as you probably imagine—it is a Latin reflection meaning the highest good."

"I don't care what it means," said the official, bluntly; "speak English, and take care what you are about."

I had not liked my father's satire, or the mock politeness with which he had explained himself to the officer. It was painful to me, and above all a cruel waste of time.

"When I started from Natal," I said, "it was with very different feelings from these."

"Ah! if you had only waited for my letter—

if you had not been in a hurry to return to England—if you had been only more cautious and less precipitate, what a deal of misery it might have saved us both !” he said almost reproachfully.

“I should have come to England just the same—I should have been more prepared for—for this—that’s all !” I exclaimed ; “but I could not have remained at the Cape, knowing of the trouble that has happened here.”

“Good girl,” he said, looking down and passing one thin tremulous hand for an instant across his face, “but what use can you be to me—and what real good can you do ?”

“Heaven knows that,” I replied, “but there is you to think about, and there is Katie.”

“And now there is your misery to be added to our unlucky fate. What is to become of you without friends and without money?—what—”

“Never mind me,” I said, interrupting him ; “I have youth and strength, and a trust in God not deserting me. I shall not find all the ways of living closed against me, and friends to help will come forward in good time.”

“There’s Herbert Westmair—he promised that he would do the best for you, Faith, that he could.”

“Not a Westmair,” I said quickly; “the Westmairs believe you guilty, father.”

“Ah, yes, so they do,” he added, after a furtive glance across at me; “and if you can get on without anybody’s assistance, so much the better. I despise these Westmairs as much as you do; they have not acted well by me, not one of them; they would not show mercy to an old servant,” he cried more warmly; “they would not overlook one fault, or see one excuse; they brought me to this with a relentless cruelty; they had no heart to spare ME.”

“Did—did you really take the money, then?” I asked.

I had not believed the reports against him, or had any faith in the justice of his trial. I had only confidence in him, and in the honour of our family, that I had never thought to see crushed underfoot like this.

He looked down again, and said very slowly in reply—

"Well, I—I certainly took the money—for a time."

"Oh, father! I did not believe it until to-day!"

"I took the money by degrees, Faith, knowing very well that I should be able to return it," he continued; "I was as sure of restoring it as of living, when the blow came for which I was unprepared. It was a loan, not a robbery; the Westmairs would have had every penny back of that money which they could so well afford to spare, if a little more time had been given me. A week later I should have been a rich man, as I told you—as I wrote to you."

"In what way?" I said.

"Oh, don't ask me; I can't say now—I daren't. But when I come out of this den, there will be a glorious revenge for you and me over these money-grubbing wretches. We have only two years to bear up and keep strong—only two short years, Faith."

He rubbed one thin hand over the other; his eyes sparkled, and his face lighted up with a new expression, but I took no courage from his

change of manner. I was wholly cast down ; I stood in the darkness, with all my light of life quenched out—a poor woman, who must bear her share of his shame by the closeness of the tie which linked her to him. I did not believe in his future, and could I have taken every word to heart, it would not have raised my spirits one degree. The stern fact before me was not to be softened down by any far-off dream of prosperity ; my father was a thief, and there was no excuse for him.

I could pity him ; I could not understand him. I had come there with the desire of sustaining him by asserting that I did not believe in his guilt, that I would wait patiently for his liberty, and devote my life afterwards to his comfort, to the proving of his innocence, if it were in any way possible—and now all was over with my fallacy.

There was more for me to do ; all might be closing in upon me in the valley of the shadow of crime, but I had not fulfilled my mission. I had not forgotten it ; I had kept guard upon the time allowed me for the interview, scoring



minute by minute by my little silver watch, but there was this great awful stone to roll away first. And it had rolled back upon every hope that I had clung to !

“It is only looking forwards—looking upwards to heaven—that can keep us strong for those two years,” I said.

“You must not give way, Faith,” he replied with alacrity, turning the tables unceremoniously upon me ; “you must be brisk, and look about you. Have you written to your uncle ? He might feel disposed to arrange for your passage out again.”

“I shall not return to the Cape.”

“As you please. In my miserable position, I cannot decide what is best for you. How much money have you got ?”

“Not a great deal,” I replied, “but never mind that. Tell me where to find Katie.”

“She has left Dorset Street,” he replied ; “but I don’t know where she is at present. She will write to me when she is settled. She may have written already for what I know. I must not receive letters too frequently ; it is against the



rules. If anything had happened I should have heard."

"But have you no idea where she is?" I asked eagerly.

"Not the slightest notion in the world," he answered.

"And you are not anxious about her! I cannot understand that, and she so young."

"Katie has a shrewd head on her shoulders," said my father, with an easy confidence; "she is sure to do well. She knows the world, and is not afraid of it. I am far more nervous about you than her, Faith."

"I do not see why."

"Because you do not know the world, my child; you are not a business woman, or see the right way to make the best of everything," he replied. "Your uncle has spoiled you for anything like every-day work; I was sure of that by your letters of the last two years, and when I wrote to you to come back, it was to set you above all work for ever."

"I am in the greatest fear concerning Katie," I said, indignantly; "I hold it that she is far

too young to be surrounded by temptations—to be alone, and without one true friend of whom she might seek counsel.”

“Meaning yourself,” said my father, with a lurking smile that vexed me, flickering for an instant at the corners of his mouth. “Ah! Faith, you must be less conceited, if you wish to make your way.”

“Yes, yes, perhaps so,” I replied, with impatience; “but tell me what you think has become of her? You must have some vague idea, or reason for your confidence in her, and her power to keep strong. I left a weak, impulsive thoughtless girl behind me, when I said good-bye in Dorset Street.”

“She was only thirteen years of age then—her character had not formed—she was a mere child,” he said. “My dear Faith, you do not make any allowance for time.”

“You have your own idea where she is,” I reiterated, “and that renders you satisfied. But I am reckless and unhappy.”

“Katie would get a situation at once; anyone would see that she was a shrewd and sharp

young woman," my father argued. "She is clever at many things, would do for a governess, a teacher of music and singing, a milliner—she always made her own bonnets wonderfully well—anything. What does it matter, for two years, how she works, so that she works honestly? She will have the patience to wait for my liberty, and after that I promise both of you independence, not as a dream, but as a solid and substantial fact, upon which you and she may infallibly rely—infallibly!" he repeated, his face lighting up again with the strange suddenness that I had before noticed.

"And you do not know—you cannot guess—where Katie is?" I urged once more, without heeding his sanguine utterances.

"My dear girl, I cannot guess at present. If I knew I would tell you. Why should I keep two sisters apart, who would be of mutual service and support to each other?"

"Why should you, indeed?" I said, discomfited.

"You need not distress yourself about Katie," he said; "she was partly earning her own

living—keeping home together with me—before the collapse came.”

“Ah! no one has told me that before,” I cried.

“She was short of pocket-money, and I was not able to increase it, so she found a few pupils to take elementary lessons in music; she was quick and clever, and, with all my faults, I had not neglected her education any more than I had yours. I would even suggest, in your case, an advertisement for——”

“Do you know the addresses of any of those pupils?” I asked eagerly.

“Upon my word, I never troubled myself about them. I cannot tell you; perhaps Mrs. Simmons can.”

“No, she cannot, I am afraid. It was not her business.”

“I could not spare a moment to think of anything but my own plans,” he said, half in apology; “early and late, before and after business hours, I was paving my way to fortune, Faith.”

Paving his way to gaol, he meant, but I did not say so, though a sense of injury was stronger

within me than he ever knew. He had not thought much of Katie; she had been left wholly to herself, poor child; she had grown callous or indifferent to neglect, and to the sad surroundings which neglect of her had caused, and the result he had termed her knowledge of the world.

“If I could only find her—only judge her for myself!” I murmured.

The warder shuffled with his feet, and yawned. I looked quickly at my watch: it was close upon the time to conclude an interview in which I had learned nothing, and by which I had only encountered disappointment. Everything was against Faith Kirby when she came back to England!

“I suppose we must say good-bye in a minute or two,” he remarked. “You must get acquainted with the rules of the place, and find out when to write, and the days when you will be allowed to see me. I wish I knew what you thought of doing,” he added, with that strange aggravating concern for me, and unconcern for his younger daughter, that had already irritated me.

“Did you ever hear that Richard Simmons was in love with Katie, and that there was between them a kind of flirtation?” I suddenly thought of asking him.

“God bless me—never!” exclaimed my father, betraying more surprise and interest than I had anticipated; “I should not have allowed it for an instant. I am astonished—who told you? how could it have occurred that a wretched fellow like Simmons—oh, you must have been misinformed, Faith.”

“His mother was my informant,” I replied; “he does not seek to conceal that he is attached to Katie.”

“Attached, indeed! And does he think that Katie is attached to him?” he cried.

“No.”

“Of course not. He——”

“Time’s up,” said the warder.

“One moment!” I cried. “I have a suspicion that he knows where Katie is, or knows something more concerning her than he has ventured to tell me. Is that likely?”

“Very unlikely,” said the prisoner in reply,

“but there’s no telling. Watch him. Good-bye, child. Keep strong; remember mine is not a long sentence, and if I ever get out of this it will be well with all of us. God bless you, good-bye.”

“Good-bye.”

The door opened behind me, and I was hurried away. The interview was over, and I had profited nothing by it. I had been amazed by many things: by his trust in Katie and his want of trust in me, by his confession of guilt, and—greatest amazement as well as sorrow to me—by his total want of penitence for the crime which had placed him there a prisoner. If I had been allowed a longer grace, if I could have been with him all day, and so have understood him better, and seen more deeply into his heart—if he had not altered so much in character, as well as in outward appearance—if I could have won his confidence a little more before I went away!

It was bright day still when a warder was locking and chaining behind me the great gates through which I had passed, but I did not see

my way so clearly as on the night I first came back. Through the fog and darkness about me then, I had more hopes than one to keep me strong—how many were left me now?



## CHAPTER XI.

## STRUGGLING.

IT has not fallen to the lot of many who cast their eyes upon these pages, to feel so utterly alone as myself in a great city, completely isolated from that kith and kin on whom one naturally relies when the unforeseen strikes hard and beats down. I could not believe in anyone to help me; I felt that I must help myself or perish.

The Westmairs recurred to me once—the offer of Herbert Westmair to befriend me, more than once—but it was these people who had brought about my misfortune, and who had suffered by my father's acts. Better die than go to them—than be in any way indebted to

them, I thought, even if they would help me, which, for some reason that I did not gauge, I doubted extremely. The Westmairs had been wronged, but they had been merciless, and the stern man whom I had faced in the counting-house, and who had told me the truth, clearly and coldly, and with no sign of feeling for my sore distress, I already disliked and feared. By my own exertions I must sink or swim.

I began to strive for myself, after my own fashion, not forgetting Katie meanwhile, and doing everything that lay in my power to find her. Mrs. Simmons knew but little of Katie's pupils—she had heard of them, but had not troubled her head concerning them. Before the piano was sold, one or two “bits of girls” used to take lessons in the first floor front, my landlady informed me; but she had never asked their names, or, she added with a sniff, thought that they were worth much. As for friends in the neighbours, Katie had never had any friends. The same question put to Dick Simmons elicited a similar response—he had been interested in Katie, but not in her surroundings.

Still I persevered in the hope of finding her. When I was about my own business, I sought the most crowded thoroughfares, thinking that in some open street or park, or at some window, I should see her fresh young face again. Meanwhile I strove hard to fight my way out of my difficulties. I read the newspapers for advertisements of governesses or companions, and answered all that seemed suitable to my capacity ; I advertised once on my own account, and received fourteen answers from agents anxious to direct my attention to their respective methods of bringing my requirements before the public ; I called upon one or two clergymen who were polite, and on one or two clergymen's wives who were not ; I endeavoured to discover a Mr. Green who had been a friend of Uncle Jef's some years ago, and whose name suddenly recurred to me, and I found out that he was dead ; I tried the Missionary Society that had sent out Uncle Jef, but I was not in their line, and they were very sorry, but they really could not do anything for me. There were a few who seemed interested, and who promised to write if they

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should hear of anything—but they never heard, or they had very bad memories, poor things. Sometimes I think that had I been less open in my revelation—for my father's story always rose to the surface and set my listeners against me—I might have done better and found life easier to confront, even with no references to back my claims. If mine had not been a fight against time, the chances would have been more in my favour. Uncle Jef would think of something for me when I could hear from him; and yet he was very poor, and I could not return to Natal, even if he could raise the money, with so much mystery about me. And time was everything.

By the end of October I had disposed of my watch and ear-rings—the locket with Katie's hair in it I still clung to—and was looking wistfully down into the big box of clothes which had found its way to Dorset Street. After the box was empty, what then? I marvelled very much what then, and Mrs. Simmons marvelled with me if she were in a good temper; and if any accident had rendered her more fretful than

ordinary, she would say it served me right for leaving a good home in a wild-goose fashion. She was always sorry in her better moods for all that she had said in her worse ; for, after all, she was a good woman whom ill-luck had only ground to a sharp edge.

All the month of November Dick Simmons was dull and steady, and his mother hoped that he was growing out of his nonsense when he stopped at home every evening, and went to sleep with his head over the back of the chair and his mouth wide open.

“I think he is coming round,” she said, more than once to me ; “p’raps being out of work for a while won’t do him any harm. It’s done silly people a sight of good afore this.”

Misfortunes had not come alone to this little house, and Mrs. Simmons, her son, and I, were all out of work together. There was not any prospect of getting work either, and Dick’s Sunday suit, of which his mother was somewhat vain, went the way of many articles that had come from Natal in my big box, and of many little household gods, the especial pro-

perty of my cross landlady. How they got to the pawnbroker's—for that was the destination at which they finally arrived—was by a circuitous route, common enough to such shabby-genteel people as we were. We were too proud in our little way to face the pawnbroker ourselves. Mrs. Simmons would not have had her neighbours know, for the world, that she was completely down, and I was ashamed, and dreadfully conscious that I was not so strong-minded as I ought to have been. We did not lose by the employment of a commission-agent—a sharp-dealing, bargain-driving, coaxing woman, who knew every pawnbroker's shop, and the idiosyncrasies of every pawnbroker's assistant, within a mile and a half of Dorset Street, and whose small commission on the transaction repaid her for her trouble, and spared our petty pride. In a poor neighbourhood there is always one of these business-like go-betweens, as amongst the poor there are always a certain proportion too proud to own how low they have fallen, and too proud or nervous themselves to cross the threshold of that handy shop

with the three balls, where money is lent on proper securities, of which the maximum is diamonds, and the minimum flat-irons.

By the middle of December we were almost facing the worst ; we had made a brave fight for it, and had only just begun to talk of giving up, and of not knowing which way to turn. Dick Simmons was still out of work—dull and patient, if not enterprising—a man whom I did not take to in any great degree, and yet whom I did not wholly dislike. In his sober moments he was amiable and willing ; ready to help his mother by holding the baby, or going out on errands for her ; but he was always taciturn and stolid, and not good company. The big box was empty at last ; all my best things had been negotiated for, and the landlord was threatening to seize on Mrs. Simmons's furniture for the quarter's rent due last Michaelmas. We three unfortunates stared each other in the face one evening, and acknowledged that we did not see our way much further along the flinty road which we had pursued together for seven weeks.



"The sticks will be seized, that's the next thing," said Mrs. Simmons, "and then there's the 'House' for me and baby, and p'raps Dick."

"If it wasn't the winter coming on!" said Dick, moodily; "that's the worst of it, the infernal winter."

"I don't see how you're to get along without us, Faith," Mrs. Simmons remarked slowly, after Dick had put on his hat and walked out of the house.

I had become "Faith" to her in these unlucky days; a common trouble had made us better friends, and when we did not speak of Katie we agreed pretty well together.

"I suppose they will take me into the House too," I said, with a little shiver. "Do I belong to this parish, or to any parish? Presently I shall hear from Pietermaritzburg" (which I never, never did!) "and all will be well. But, till then, I must bear up as well as I can."

"You're not a bad one to bear up, and trying hard and finding nothing don't seem to make you fret much," said Mrs. Simmons; "that's



why you're the first Kirby I ever had a good opinion on."

"I don't believe that this misery is to last; I can't believe even now that I am wholly without friends," I said.

"How about the Westmairs?"

I hesitated; for the first time there was a strong temptation to seek them out, but I resisted it. In the face of Herbert Westmair there had been good-nature, and he had proffered help once, but I could not seek charity from him. And the other man, dark and stern and unsympathetic, who had repelled me on that foggy afternoon on which I had met him first, he was only to be thought of with a shudder, as the evil genius who had cast a blight upon my life.

"No, not the Westmairs," I said; "if I despise anybody, it is those people."

"I daresay you're right," murmured Mrs. Simmons.

"This is the last week that I can pay you anything for board and lodging."

"Oh, I know," said Mrs. Simmons, shortly.

“So I’ll go.”

“Go where?”

“I don’t quite know; I must make my case known to the——”

“Yes, yes,” said Mrs. Simmons, again interrupting me; “I guess what you’re going to say, but don’t say it. And—don’t go, girl; don’t leave me—if there’s any fight left in us, let’s fight it out together. There!”

She ran out of the room with the baby to prevent further argument or thanks on my part, and I remained by the empty fire-grate to shed a few tears over this cross woman’s kindness, for, from a Simmons to a Kirby, it was more than common kindness, I was sure. It was not wholly for my money that Mrs. Simmons wished me to remain, and I did not feel so much alone in the world after that. Odd it was that I had learned to respect this woman; more odd was it, possibly, that she had taken kindly to me.

We fought on, and the landlord was a lenient man, who did not put his awful threat of “execution” into effect. Thank Heaven, there

are some men easy with the rent down the back streets, in the shadows of which the starvelings struggle! We struggled with the rest, and Mrs. Simmons obtained a little work occasionally at neighbours' houses, whilst I was useful at home taking care of baby. There was no work for me; my character had not come from Natal, my father was in prison, and there was no one to trust me. I was strong still—I had the vigour and power to work, but the task-master was wanting. The shops were full of young women, and there were hundreds with excellent references waiting their turn to be employed—what could I expect under the circumstances but Society's cry of "Stand back?"

It was at this time that Dick Simmons took to drinking again. Weak-minded man as he was—with all the slates on the roof not properly adjusted—this was no matter of surprise to me, and only a natural disappointment to the mother, who thought poor Dick had taken a turn for the better. That which really surprised us both was, where Dick found the money to get drunk with. Night after night, for one week,

did Dick Simmons return to Dorset Street in the same muddled and benumbed condition of mind, never betraying any hilarity in his cups, but maintaining the same stolidity of aspect, varied now and then by a spasmodic burst of excitement, which had marked his manner the first evening that I had had the honour of his acquaintance. In the morning he would slink from the house, without seeing us if it were possible, but when intercepted on the door-mat by his mother, he would set his back against the wall and argue the case out, taking his stand decisively on the one point that he had not had a drop too much the night before.

"If you have any money, you should know better than to drink it away now," said Mrs. Simmons in her last *rencontre* with her hopeful offspring.

"I haven't a penny."

"Then how do you get drink?"

"I meet a pal or two and they stand treat," he explained—"they don't stand much, not so much as I should, if I was in work," he added with a sorrowful shake of his head over the

little meannesses of his acquaintances—"and it knocks me over at times. I was not drunk last night, upon my soul!"

"What was the matter with you?"

"I was miserable."

"Oh—get out!" cried Mrs. Simmons; "a pretty son you are—there, go and drink your hardest."

"I'm going to try for a place."

"Try away!" and Mrs. Simmons banged the street-door so closely upon the retreating figure of her son, that that promising young man ran a little way into the road, where he paused and scowled back at the house before turning in the direction of Tudor Street. Later in the day I met Richard Simmons in Fleet Street; he was not a particularly smart young man to be seen with in the broad daylight—his Sunday suit, we know, having gone the way of many things—but I was shabby myself now. I had made one or two calls at dress-makers' and drapers, in the hope of procuring needle-work—I shudder still at these past efforts, and the miserable monotony of failure which invariably followed

—and Dick had waited for me outside one of these establishments.

“Any good?” he asked, like a man interested in my rise in life.

I shook my head and tried to smile. He had not appeared interested in my efforts before, and I was astonished at his curiosity. I asked him if he had been more fortunate than I.

“Not a bit. I shall enlist if this goes on much longer,” he said, “or if mother nags me much more. As if I had not enough to worry me as it is!”

He looked so hard at me that I said—

“Have you anything more to worry you than your mother has?”

He gave vent to a short laugh.

“I should think I had. Did you see your father at Holloway that day?” he asked, after a sudden pause.

“Yes.”

“What did he say about Katie?” he inquired eagerly. “What did he think of it all? Has he heard from her? Does she write to him?”

"He has not heard from Katie," I answered.

"He does not know where she is?"

"No more than you do," I said.

The old suspicion that Dick Simmons knew more of Katie than he had ever cared to own came to me in full force when I had become aware of the effect of my reply. I had not intended to startle him in any way, but when he turned very red and looked for an instant in a scared manner at me, the doubts that I had had of him rose again.

"Oh, Dick!" I cried, "you do know, then! and yet you keep me in the dark in this way."

"No—no—don't think that, Miss Kirby," he said.

He crossed the road and walked rapidly away to avoid my further questioning. He did not return home till a late hour, and it was with the same shuffling tread and fishy eyes that he entered the room and looked round at us.

"Any news?" he asked, in a thick voice.

There was no news.

“Any letters?”

No, there were no letters.

These were his invariable questions, after which he would sit down for a few minutes, and after muttering something about “bed,” say “Good night,” and shuffle his way up-stairs. On this occasion his mother said, after his withdrawal—

“I won’t stand this any longer. I’ll find out where he goes, and who makes him drunk like this, if I watch him for a week.”

*Watch him!* It had been my father’s advice that I should do so if I suspected in any way that he was in communication with Katie. And if he knew where Katie was, and was hiding the secret from me, and to my disadvantage—perhaps to my sister’s—surely I had a right to follow one who was taking this heartless part against me. If his actions were straightforward I should do him no harm, and if they led me to Katie I was doing my duty. Still I shrank from playing the spy upon him, though in the mystery about his actions there seemed to be a key to Katie’s life.



I told Mrs. Simmons of my suspicions, and what my father had advised me to do, and she said quickly—

“It’s not that foolery! Dick could not have kept it to himself all this while; he’s not deep enough. You can come with me if you like and see for yourself though. We shall not have to go further than the first gin-shop.”

“No, thank you; I would rather not follow him.”

The thought of playing the spy upon Dick Simmons made me blush still. I resolved to leave that task to the mother, relying upon any information which she might be able to obtain for me. But when the opportunity came I was less a heroine than I had hoped to be, and Mrs. Simmons was not at hand to take my place.

The mother and baby were from home when Dick Simmons came in to his tea one Saturday evening. He was not in the habit of taking tea with us now. Most of his time was spent in the streets, looking out for the new berth that

was never available, and his return was a surprise.

"Your mother is out," I said, "but I can make you some tea if you wish."

"Is there any left?"

"A little."

"Never mind," he said. "I don't want any. I thought some might be about, that's all."

To do Dick Simmons justice, he was a man who endured privation in order to lessen the housekeeping expenses. Perhaps he even got intoxicated late at night that he might spoil his appetite for the next day, and this drinking bout was part of his theory. Dick Simmons was determined not to have any tea that evening, at least.

"I shall be off again directly," he said. "It doesn't matter, Miss Kirby. Go on with your work. What work is it?"

"It is needlework which your mother has obtained," I said.

"And you're helping her. That's kind of you," he remarked.

He went up-stairs to his room, from which I

thought he would never come down again, wherein I was inclined to think by degrees, not being used to his eccentricities, that something serious had happened to him. It was five o'clock when he had returned; it was half-past seven when I had grown nervous enough to proceed up-stairs and knock at his door.

There was no answer, and becoming alarmed, I turned the handle of the door, which was unlocked, and peered into the room. He had only gone to sleep, I thought, with his head upon his arms, which he had folded on the top of the chest of drawers before which he was standing. His wiry hair was in close proximity to a candle-flame, quenched to a lurid blot by its neglected wick. As I turned the handle he jumped nervously, knocked a card off the drawers to the floor, looked round and glared at me.

"What is it?" he exclaimed. "What's the matter?"

"Nothing, only you did not answer when I knocked, and I was afraid that you were ill."

"I'm all right. I think I must have fallen asleep. I've a knack of dropping off like this."

I should have withdrawn, apologising for my intrusion on his toilette, had my attention not been directed to that which he had swept from the drawers to the strip of carpet at his feet. It was his nervous stoop towards it which attracted me, otherwise his red eyes, swollen with crying, had not been sufficient to engage my notice. It was a *carte-de-visite*, that he was anxious to pick up before I should perceive it ; but my eyes were sharp, and the distance from the door to the drawers was not great. The instant afterwards, when it was clutched in his trembling hands, I was sure whose portrait it was. All so quick and sudden as it had been, still I was not deceived, and it was Katie's likeness upon which he was turning the key in the top drawer.

"That is my sister's *carte* !" I cried.

"No, it isn't. You're always wrong," he answered savagely.

I went down-stairs, convinced that I was right, trying to make sure in my own mind of the face that I had seen, being quite sure that it was Katie's face, for all the womanly look

that four years had given to it, and for all the fleeting glimpse I had obtained. I was wondering why Dick Simmons should conceal it and make a mystery of it, when he came into the parlour with the light in his hand. He was clad in the one every-day suit that was left to him; but a remnant of past finery, in the shape of his vivid blue stock, had been plastered on his chest and over his soiled linen.

“I shan’t be late, tell mother,” he said without looking at me, as he turned towards the passage.

As the door closed, the thought seized me that he was going to Katie, that now by following him I might solve the mystery which kept her hidden from me. In a minute it was settled in my mind that I would find out where he was going. I was a woman at her wit’s-end, who was being trifled with, and kept from true friends and real assistance. I would make sure if he were going to Katie or not. He was keeping something back; there was a motive for its concealment, and I must find it out. My bonnet and shawl had not been long laid aside;

they were still on the sofa in the parlour. I put them on with trembling hands, and in one minute I had extinguished the light, and was closing the street-door noiselessly behind me. It was doubtful at what hour Mrs. Simmons and baby would return, or who would be at home first after a long quest for work, and we were both furnished with latch-keys, the property of the lodgers, when lodgers were upstairs. I had been very quick, but I thought that I had missed the one whom I was resolved to follow to his haunts, wherever they might be. There was no sign of Dick Simmons in the ill-lighted street, but I turned into Tudor Street, and hurried along towards Bridge Street, Blackfriars. At the top of the street I saw him slouching on towards the bridge. I was acting ungenerously, perhaps, but I was excited, and I was glad that I had come upon his track.

He passed over the bridge to the Surrey side of London, loitering once by the way to look at the dark river, and then went on rapidly, like a man whose mind was made up, to his destination. In my shabby shawl and brown dress

I followed, scarcely able to keep up with him, and thankful when he slackened his pace a little. I knew that I had grown weaker lately—much weaker—by my trouble in walking as fast as he did, by my weak knees, and an odd internal catching, which brought on fitful attacks of side-ache, that suggested my giving up, and sitting on a door-step to recover all the breath which I had lost. But I kept on with him, and after a while he walked less rapidly, and rendered my task more easy. Thus I passed from my still life, my dead level of hard times, to a life of which I had never dreamed when I shut myself out that night in Dorset Street.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE HALL OF HARMONY.

BEING City-born, and four years of my childhood confined to City-streets, the great tract of poor man's land across the bridge was utterly unknown to me. The Surrey side was a *terra incognita*, and the streets and by-ways of Lambeth a labyrinth wherein I had never lost myself before. I followed Dick Simmons closely, keeping so short a distance behind him, as the streets grew full of people, that had he turned he must have seen me. The crowds about that Saturday night did not alarm me; the elements of poverty and crime were thick enough, a surging mass of humankind; but, making allowance for increase of numbers and



difference of locality, they were the same men, women, and children huckstering before the same cheap shops, and quarrelling at the doors of the same garish gin-palaces, who were common to the streets in Drury Lane or Holborn. The thoroughfares were of a greater length, and there was more uproar in them—one, I thought, would never end its line of bakers', butchers,' and oil-shops, its row of costermongers' stalls and barrows on the kerbstones, its long and grim procession of those who had come out to buy, or sell, or beg, or steal, who choked up the pavement, and filled the roadway, and drifted on, an endless chain of misery and squalor.

Surely I was mistaken, and Dick Simmons knew nothing of my sister. He could not be approaching Katie in this direction; her life could not be spent in the midst of the wretchedness in which I was submerged. I had been wrong; and this was a purposeless, profitless errand I was engaged in.

Very few passers-by took heed of me; I was not well clad, the dark shawl which I had

wrapped round me was threadbare, and its semblance of gentility had been worn away by contact with rough corners. I was not in contrast to the general community, but in agreement with its tone and colour. One or two policemen looked hard at me, as if they knew the faces in these stifling streets by heart, and mine was an intrusion there. A few mechanics dressed up for a Saturday night's loafing leered at me, and one said, "How are you?" with an insolent familiarity that would have made me clutch Dick Simmons's arm for protection's sake, had the man not passed on with the tide.

Dick Simmons was simply taking a walk ; but I did not think of turning back and retracing my way to Dorset Street. I seemed safer with his round shoulders before me. He was in no great hurry ; the goods upon the various stalls distracted his attention ; he stopped five minutes listening to a doleful song chanted by a blind man, who accompanied himself on a violin ; and he betrayed so much interest in the contents of a ready-made clothing establishment, with suf-

ficient gas behind its plate-glass windows to have lighted up a town, that a hook-nosed youth rushed at him with a handbill, and endeavoured by gentle force to budge him through a row of waxen dummies into the interior of the premises. Poor Dick! I could not help smiling, in the midst of my anxiety, at the tout's mis-spent energy in endeavouring to secure a customer, and at Dick with his hands in his empty pockets, promising, in a patronising manner, to look in as he came back. But I was soon grave again; and when he had crossed a large street and gone on under a railway arch into a narrower, darker, and denser thoroughfare, having still its crowds of people making for the neighbourhood we had quitted, or coming from it with ourselves, I wondered more than ever when he would attain his journey's end, or turn his steps towards his home. He stopped at last at the doors of another public-house, and applied himself to read some bills pasted on the panels, which process having been carefully gone through, he entered the side door of the establishment with an alacrity that took me for an

instant off my guard. I followed him instinctively. No one arrested his progress, but a man at the top of a flight of stairs, who had nodded in a friendly manner to him as he passed, held out his hand to me.

"Check, miss," he said, seeing that I paused in my surprise.

"Check!—what place is this, then?"

"Well, that's a good un," the man remarked, as others passed me, better acquainted with the rules of the establishment, and put into his hands little slips of coloured card. I waited patiently for a few minutes, and when there was a lull in the business of the house, I said—

"Is this a place of amusement?"

"I should rather say it was," the man replied, eyeing me with a little curiosity at last.

"A theatre?"

"Theatre, no. Where have you been brought up, my gal, not to know Baxter's Hall of Harmony?"

"What is that?"

The man surveyed me still more critically, thrust his tongue into his cheek, and said, "Oh,

these try-ons won't do for me," after which he took no further notice of me.

I descended the stairs. I had lost Dick Simmons, and it was time to go home. I had played the spy for no end or purpose, and he had not been thinking of my sister when he left Dorset Street that evening. And yet I had seen Katie's portrait in his hand before he had quitted home, and there had been in his manner a something that was suspicious. As I went towards the street, I observed a man peering at me through a pigeon-hole in the wall, above which was painted PAY HERE; and a few steps further on, I came upon the bills again. This time I stopped to read them, to learn that the place was called the Hall of Harmony, that the sole lessee and director was Mr. Benjamin Baxter, and that the price of admission varied from threepence to eighteenpence. The entertainment provided for the patrons of the Hall of Harmony appeared to be of a varied character—singing, comic ballet, negro melodists, contortionists, ventriloquists, ballet again, more singing "by a host of professional talent," the

names of which were in red or black capitals: Funny Fred, Sam Wiggins the renowned comic, Tommy Pounce the Colossal, and innumerable young ladies called respectively Polly, Lizzie, Jenny, and Katie by way of prefix to high-sounding surnames. *Katie!*—that dear old name did not even strike me as familiar in juxtaposition with the name of Baskerville, but on my second reading my heart gave a sudden plunge, and I appeared to have struck upon the truth as upon a rock that wrecked me. “KATIE BASKERVILLE—*her First Appearance after her highly successful tour in the provinces, in a round of her most brilliant and fascinating Character-songs.*”

Was this the Katie of whom I had been in search so long?—was this my little sister whom I had loved so well? I hoped not: standing in a doorway, hustled by the pleasure-seekers, I prayed not, with quivering lips, and with the tears slowly falling down my cheeks in spite of me; and yet I had become terribly sure that it was she.

With a sudden wrench away from the glar-

ing red letters, I went to the pigeon-hole whence the man had watched me.

“Has—has Miss Baskerville sung yet?”

“She doesn’t come on till half-past ten.”

“Indeed—thank you.”

I went into the street, and back along the pavement, till the cross thoroughfare was reached, and a pawnbroker’s shop discovered. I had not a half-penny with me, but the gold locket with Katie’s portrait therein lay still on my bosom, and I must part with it to solve the mystery. I did not think of the middle-woman who had been of service to my poor pride in Dorset Street, but I walked boldly down a dark side entry, pushed open a swing-door, passed into a narrow compartment, and laid my last resource upon the counter of the shop.

“What can you lend me on this?” I asked, and a sleek young man in a black apron took it up, held it to the light, examined it with one eye shut, and said with a business-like briskness, “Five-and-six.” The bargain was concluded, the ticket was made out, the money was handed across the counter to me, the locket was

transferred, and I could have cried bitterly again as I passed into the passage, hustling by more poverty-driven atoms, in my haste to reach the music-hall at the bottom of the next street.



## CHAPTER XIII.

## “KATIE BASKERVILLE.”

IN the midst of my excitement, I was very economical. I paid the lowest price for admission to the Hall of Harmony, for two reasons ; the first because I was short of money, and the second because an instinct assured me that I should be safer in the poorest and lowest part of this place of entertainment. Possibly I was right, but after ascending several flights of stone steps, and finally discovering myself in a crowded gallery, very hot, very full of tobacco-smoke, very close to the ceiling, and very far away from the stage, I wished that I had been less studious in the matter of expenditure.

Still I had good eyes, and to save sixpence or a shilling was a feat worth taking credit for in those strange times which had come about my life. I should at least see this Katie Baskerville from my back seat in the gallery, and should be able to recognise her if the singer were identical with my sister. Oh, to be disappointed, to feel that there was not a clue to her, or her mode of living! oh, never to find her again, I thought, rather than that the discovery should come on such a night, and in such a fashion!

I had been brought up by my uncle with strict notions of propriety; four years of a peaceful and a religious sphere had given me more than a bias towards his own puritanism, and led me to regard the amusements of the stage and of the music-halls as a something very alien to all that was right and God-following. I was surveying the prospect with too much horror for my years, as people will do whose lives stand wholly apart from such unreal worlds as these; but my fears were not groundless even in their most exaggerated sense, and it was a world, God knows! in which no honest father, mother,

brother, sister, could have wished to see the dear ones take a foremost place.

It was long before I settled down, if it can be said that I settled down at all. I took my seat by the side of a stout old woman and her husband, and was soon shut in by those more late than I—boys let off from office, or shop, or factory, who smoked vile cigars, and swore vile oaths; and slatternly girls of every age from twelve to twenty—some bonnetless and shawl-less, and more eager for amusement than for food—who leaned upon my shoulder, and those of the next row in general, and screamed with laughter at every miserable jest, or applauded noisily some poor spangled mountebank swinging at a rope's end within a hair's breadth of his life.

The novelty of all this was neither exciting nor amusing, though I had soon become accustomed to my position. The amusement depressed or scandalised me, and the saddest and most heart-chilling phase of it all was in the conviction that these crowds of young men and women, and of boys and girls, took an immense

pleasure in the exhibition and its miserable surroundings. Ah! I was only a pious little soul from Pietermaritzburg, and the drinking, smoking, riotous world was a new and strange one, which I condemned wholly at first sight. I was in that world, but not of it; it might have been part and parcel of a dream, had it not been for the sense of grim expectancy at my full heart. I did not pay attention to the stage; the ballet and its immodest crew of dancers followed the mountebanks, and vulgarists, one of whom, a man more vulgar than the rest particularly earned the favour and applause of the community, who roared out, "Bravo, Pounce! Bravo, Tommy!" and who was undoubtedly "Tommy Pounce, the Colossal," a man whose general bearing assured me that he knew his market value, and took his meed of praise as a fitting tribute to his genius.

I peered into the pit, and discovered Dick Simmons amongst the faces there. He was sitting with his mouth open and his hands in his pockets, not an attentive observer of all that was going on, but a weary, sleepy-looking

being, tired out, as it were, with waiting. Waiting for whom? For Katie, as I waited, perhaps! The reserved seats close to the stage were as full as more humble parts of the house, but possibly a trifle less respectable, judging by some red-faced women in silks and satins at the tables; and Simmons was wedged in between two youths of nineteen, who were smoking hard, in defiance of the probabilities of a collapse. When would Miss Baskerville appear? I had glanced furtively at the programme which the stout woman beside me held in her hands, and I felt sure that one or two names succeeding Katie Baskerville had already taken precedence. I summoned courage to address my neighbour.

“Is Miss Baskerville sure to sing to-night?”

“Lor’ bless you, my gal! sure as ’ouses,” replied the stout lady; “on’y she’s singing somewhere else, and can’t hit it exact to time like.”

“It wouldn’t be best for old Baxter if Katie didn’t come,” added her husband, looking round the ample proportions of his better half at me. “You see if it would, now! Katie’s too

much of a favourite here already. I don't believe little Tilly Bowfort draws a better 'ouse. You've seen *her*, I s'pose?"

"No."

"Ain't you though?" and after a pitying stare at me, full of expressive sympathy in the great loss which I had sustained, chequered by some degree of doubt as to the veracity of my statement, he directed his attention to the stage again.

The stout lady became loquacious after this. Never seen Tilly Bowfort? Well, she was surprised. She beat Katie Baskeyweal in most things—in dancing p'raps, and in pluck; though she could not say anything against Katie's style, take her altogether. She thought they made too much fuss about Katie at the Hall of Harmony, but people did with new favourites—give her the old ones at any time. Old friends before new, my dear, at any time of the day. They did say Katie Baskeyweal was going to marry Tommy Pounce; but that was all talk, a friend of hers in the scene-shifting department told her only yesterday, and

capital opportunities of judging he had, being always at the back, you see. She wasn't good enough for Tommy Pounce—did I know that he kept his carriage, and drove from one music-hall to another with a pair of 'orses, my dear? As true as she was a-sitting there, she saw Tommy, only last night, drive his pair of creams from Baxter's Hall to the Conwiwial, in the Borough; and a perfect gentleman he looked every inch of him, with a real flower in his button-hole, such as you can't get at Common Garden under three-and-six, when the weather is as nipping as it has been this blessed week. Had I come alone here?

“Yes, quite alone.”

“Ah, I don't hold with gals coming alone to such places as these,” remarked the woman; “me and my old man dropping in after Saturday's marketing is different like—but you, now!” and the broad, soiled face looked with a strange womanly interest into mine.

“I am here to find a friend; I have never been before,” I said quickly, as if it were necessary to excuse my presence in some way.



“ Oh ! and he hasn’t come, I s’pose ?”

“ My friend has not come. Who’s this ?”

The entrance of a pretty girl, in a dress of pale blue silk, was the signal for a shout of welcome from three thousand voices, for a universal clapping of hands, stamping of feet, and hammering of sticks and beer-mugs on the refreshment tables, amidst which din the new-comer bowed profusely, put her hand upon her heart, and smiled right and left, above and below her.

“ That’s Katie Baskyweal,” said the old lady, joining in the applause along with her husband ; “ how nice she do look, to be sure ! She’s a-going to sing ‘ The Kicksy-wicksy Pet,’ that’s her dress for it ; I heard it two months ago.”

My heart sunk very low, and then commenced palpitating rapidly—but no, it was not my Katie, unless the distance or the dress deceived me ; not my sister Katie, of whom I had been in search. I thanked my God that I had not found her here.

And yet the instant afterwards I was in doubt again ; the features were like hers, and the short white peruke she wore would change her very



much, and give her that strange bold look. Was I wrong—was I right? Four years had passed since I had seen my sister, and the child of thirteen had grown to be a woman, but had she changed as much as that? Was she like the photograph I had seen in Dick Simmons's hand that evening, and that I had recognised at once? Yes, like the portrait more than her old self. The tumult of applause and welcome ceased, the band struck up the air; she advanced a step or two towards the footlights, and began to sing, and then I knew her by her voice.

"It is she!" I cried, so loudly that the stout woman turned and looked into my face, before it was covered with my trembling hands.

"What's the matter, gal?" said the hoarse voice in my ears, and it seemed to break upon a sea of murmurings about my dizzy brain.

"Nothing."

"You ain't well."

"No—I am very ill. Pray let me be."

"Here, take a sip of this," and something red in a flat medicine bottle was slipped into my

hands, and as quickly and silently returned to her.

“No—no—please don’t talk to me for one moment; let me think,” I entreated in a low tone.

“I wouldn’t bellock about my chap’s not meeting me,” said the comforter beside me; “lor! p’raps he couldn’t help it.”

I was silent, but I did not remove my hands from my face. I did not wish to see the stage again, or that figure on it which I had recognised. I strove to realise the position, and to act upon it. The clear, sweet, musical voice thrilled through me—but I did not hear the words, or comprehend them; they might have represented a hymn, equally as well as another sample of the meaningless doggrel to which I had listened against my will, had it not been for the shout of laughter which followed the termination of the first verse. I looked up then, and clutched my neighbour’s arm, rattling the medicine bottle, which was raised to her mouth at that moment, sharply against her teeth.

“Lorks! what are you up to now?” were the

last words I heard, as the vision of my sister, strutting to and fro with a glass to her eye, became the last phantom to scare me from the house.

I was more mad than sane in my new excitement, as I tottered down the stairs towards the street. At the wicket where the man had taken the coloured slips of card, I paused for the first time.

"How can I see Miss Baskerville?" I said, eagerly. "There is another entrance for the performers. Please be quick and tell me where it is."

"Oh, it's you, is it, agin? You can't see Miss Baskyvill," was the reply, "it ain't likely."

"I know her. She will be glad to see me," I cried; "oh, tell me which way she will come out!"

My eagerness and excitement impressed the man, for he said—

"You can try at the stage door, if you like. It's round the court—the third door on the left."

I descended the last flight of stairs to en-

counter a new and unforeseen obstacle in my way to Katie. A gentleman in a loose grey overcoat, with a cigar in his mouth, was standing on the miry pavement, paying his fare by Hansom cab, and he turned and faced me as I came with swift steps into the street. He dropped his cigar in his astonishment.

“Miss Kirby—is it you?”

It was Herbert Westmair, the man in my father's place, who had intercepted me on the threshold of this awful den. His quick glance took in my white, haggard face, my shabby raiment, and that confusion and even shame which I could not hide from him, and he said,

“I am sorry, very sorry to find you here. What has happened—what can have happened in so short a time?”

“Nothing has happened to me but poverty.”

“That comes to the best of us, Miss Kirby, but——”

“It came to me through you.”

I was wild and driven to bay, and scarcely knew what I said.

“Through me!” he cried.

“Through you Westmairs. Through your cousin, who would have no mercy on my father—through all of you.”

I would have passed him, but he stood in my way, graver than I had seen him yet.

“Miss Kirby, this is unjust, and I scarcely understand. Will you tell me first what has brought you here? and will you suffer me to tell you, in all sincerity, what kind of place this is?”

“I know what place it is,” I cried; “let me get away from it and you. How dare you stop me!”

“You are mistress of your own actions, Miss Kirby,” he said, more gravely still, as he stood aside to allow me to pass, “but I am none the less sorry to meet you under these circumstances.”

I did not understand him, then, any more than he had understood me. When I did, I felt my cheeks burning at his implied reproof, at his implied objection to my choice of amusements. Did he think, did he dare to think, that I had gone there for distraction’s sake? He who had

entered the very place of which he had warned me?

An instant afterwards, and he had passed from my hot brain. I had turned into the dark court, and was groping my way towards the professional entrance of the Hall of Harmony.

## CHAPTER XIV.

TOMMY POUNCE.

THE stage-door or artists' entrance was not difficult to discover. There was a lamp burning above it, and the ballet-girls were issuing from it: three-fourths of them shivering and ill-clad, and a few in seal-skin jackets and pork-pie hats—a jaunty crew weighed down by finery.

There were many good-nights given to a snuffy little man boxed up in an office on the left of the door, and there were not a few sharp glances in my direction as I entered.

“Oh, it's too late for her,” I heard one girl say; “as if we hadn't made up the Christmas lot ever so long ago!”

The man in the little office regarded me with distrust and disfavour, after the custom of his kind.

"I wish to see Miss Baskerville before she leaves," I said.

"Miss Baskerville's busy, and can't be bothered."

"She will see me—she will be glad to see me," I answered quickly. "I am her best friend."

"Oh!"

The door-keeper appeared puzzled.

"I'll send up your name, if you like," he said reluctantly, "and hear what she says."

"Can't I see her without that?"

"I should think not."

"I am afraid of the shock—we have not met for so long a time."

"I don't think it will answer," he said; then he raised his voice, and called "Jem!" and a boy of seventeen or eighteen came tumbling down a spiral iron staircase towards us.

"Jem, when Miss Baskerville comes off tell her that a young person wishes to speak to her



for a moment, if she has no particular objection. What name shall I say, miss?"

"Faith Kirby, from Pietermaritzburg."

"Faith Kirby, from Peter—marry—something or other. Look sharp, Jem."

One or two people came in whilst I waited; a few more ladies of the ballet tripped away; a sulky-looking man in a rusty-black velveteen coat, and two snuffling children, all comforters and caps, descended the staircase.

"I'm off, Jenkins," said the man, leaning over the half-door after a sidelong glance at me in the usual professional way. "I'll shake hands with you, old feller, and say good-bye, too."

"Oh—ah," said Jenkins, rising with not too much alacrity, and shambling across the little room, "you're going for good to-night, ain't you? Sorry to say good-bye, Amos."

The men shook hands.

"I'm not sorry," resumed Amos, in the same aggrieved tone. "I on'y wish the guv'nor may get as good a lot, as up to time, and liked on'y

'arf as well. There, I say *'arf as well*, Jenkins, and you may tell him so from me."

"I'll drop him a hint," said the office-keeper, in a tone that implied the very reverse of his promise.

"He's going in for the Salviatinis on Boxing-night," said the man, his upper lip—and a very thick upper lip it was—really and absolutely curling with scorn, and curling so much that I could have counted every tooth in his head—"and I wish him joy on 'em. They're not worth their salt"—in a husky whisper—"the old 'un can't even throw a flip-flap properly, s'elp me."

"That's a bad look-out," said Jenkins, quietly.

"Will you have a drain with me, old feller?"

"No, thankee. I can't leave yet awhile."

"Good night, then."

"Good night. I daresay I shall see you back."

"I don't know as you will," said Amos. "I don't know as I'd come back after the orful failure those Sals will make of it. I don't know

as double the money will bring me back—you see, now.” And, with many expressive nods, Amos, followed by his boys, whom I had seen as the Spanish Constellations half an hour ago, took his departure down the court. Presently Jem re-appeared, staring at me as at an object deserving of his entire attention.

“Oh, if you please, Miss Kirby, will you step into the green-room and wait for Miss Baskerville? And please say nothing about *anything*,” he added, with emphasis, “until she comes. She will be very glad to see you after her encores. You’re to be sure and wait.”

“What did she say? How did she look when you mentioned my name?” I could not forbear inquiring in my eagerness.

“She sat down, and shook like a haspern,” said Jem. “I thought she was a-going to faint.”

“Show the young lady upstairs, Jem,” said Mr. Jenkins, and I followed the call-boy up the iron staircase, and past a corner of the stage, with people standing at the wings; where, beyond them, in the glare of the gas-jets, I saw my

sister Katie, dressed as a servant-maid, I fancied, before we went up a second flight of the staircase, and entered the green-room.

At the same moment, as the door of the room closed behind me, I became aware that I was not alone, and that a sandy-haired, closely-shaven, bull-necked man of six or seven and twenty was standing with his back to the fire, and his elbows on the mantelpiece, in a somewhat inelegant attitude. He did not move as I entered, though he regarded me critically and with some wondering interest, after the fashion to which I had been subjected from all the *employés* of the establishment, so far as I had gone. I recognised him as the individual whose coarse singing, offensive demeanour, and general vulgarity had disgusted me, and raised the whole house to enthusiasm. It was Tommy Pounce, the Colossal—the great music-hall singer, who had sung his last ditties that night, and was standing with his back to the fire, in all the glory of private dress—a sight not vouchsafed to the common herd, and for which prospect, I believe, he thought I should be thankful.

There was a certain amount of good looks in the man, but of a low type, and devoid of the slightest trace of refinement; he was above the middle height, and expensively got up, having a plentitude of velvet trimming to his coat, a set of jewelled waistcoat-buttons, the heaviest of gold watch-guards, half a dozen rings on his fingers, a diamond collar-stud, a green satin scarf with bars of yellow satin crossing at right angles, and an ivory skull with diamond eyes by way of breast-pin. It was a strange thought to come across me at that moment, and with my heart aching as it did; it was born of his general appearance, and my last attempt to raise a loan, perhaps; but I wondered for an instant what he would realise at the pawn-broker's in the next street, with all those adornments thick upon him. There was a long gold-mounted whip behind him, also his property, but this I did not take into consideration till he removed it from the mantelpiece and flipped his highly-varnished boots.

I was afraid of his addressing me, and I took an old letter from my pocket and feigned to be

interested in it, but Pounce the Colossal was in no hurry to obtrude his conversation upon me. He trifled with his whip, he drew a little diagram upon the ceiling with it, he sportively lashed at some paper flowers in a vase upon the centre table, he whistled to himself, finally he replaced his whip on the mantelpiece and went slowly through his scales, being particularly dissatisfied with one note low down in his register.

Suddenly he spoke to me, and, though my heart beat nervously, I found sufficient courage to reply and check the familiar tone with which I had been sure from the first he would address me.

“Waiting for anybody in particular, my dear?”

“Sir?” I replied, interrogatively, looking him down, coldly and steadily, as it is in the power of all modest women, thank Heaven, to look down the offensive familiarity which will at times unfortunately encounter them.

“I was hasking if you were waiting for anyone in particular,” he said, in a different tone.

“I am waiting for Miss Baskerville.”

“Oh, little Basky, eh?—she’ll be off in a few minutes. I think they’ll let her off,” he added, “on this occasion with four songs.”

I resumed the reading of my letter, and Mr. Pounce, after carefully studying me, sat down, nursed one leg upon the knee of another, and sang softly to himself, like a man who was never tired of the sound of his own voice.

The door opened, and I turned eagerly towards it, to be disappointed by the sight of a second gentleman, short and thick, and middle-aged, who spoke with a slobbery accent, kept his hat on, and had an astonishingly dirty face.

“By George, Pounce! they won’t let Katie off to-night,” he cried; “she’s had another call, and didn’t want to respond, but they will have her, and she’s in again.”

“How many times does that make, guv’nor?” asked Pounce.

“Six times. Thank my stars, I said nothing about hencore money,” said the proprietor of the Hall of Harmony, rubbing his hands together.

“Six! It’s too much—it’s infernal nonsense,”



remarked the Colossal, who had been recalled four times, and now felt himself aggrieved.

“That gal’s worth fifty pound a week, but she don’t know it, Pounce,” said the other, digging his favourite comic in the ribs, who caught his hand, and gesticulated towards me.

“Eh—who?” asked the proprietor, audibly.

Some information was imparted to him, and he came bowing towards me, saying—

“A friend of Miss Baskerville, madam?”

“Yes,” I answered, “a great friend, I hope.”

“She will not be long. I am Mr. Baxter, the lessee.”

“Are you?” was my quiet answer.

“A lessee who is proud of the name of Miss Baskerville upon his bills. You may tell her that, if you like—not as from me, for I never pay compliments to people’s faces; it sounds too much like soft-sawder, you understand, ma’am. Pounce, my dear boy,” clapping his dirty hand into the hand of the Colossal, “that last song is a gem of yours. I’m proud of it,



and you. The people take up the chorus famous. They give it voice, and hollering makes them thirsty. Don't let the Manchester have it—their band's sure to spoil it, and put you out; upon my soul, they are!"

"Yes, it's a stunning good song," said Pounce, in assent, but he said not a word about excluding the Manchester from the benefit of it.

"I'd stand another quid if you'd keep the Manchester out, Tommy," said Mr. Baxter, on whose mind the song had evidently made a deep impression.

"I should like to oblige you, Baxter, my boy," said Pounce, in a plaintive tone, "but I can't sing hexclusive songs; it ain't the fair thing on me to do."

"Just as you please. Will you have a glass of wine?"

"I don't mind a B. and S."

"B. and S., if you like—anything," he said, touching the bell. "Are you waiting for Katie too, Tom?"

"Yes, I'm going to drive her as far as her door."

“What, in the trap?”

“She won’t mind. She says it will be good fun.”

“Nonsense!”

The door opened, and Jem appeared.

“Jem, bring up two brandies and sodas—quick.”

“Yes, sir—and oh! if you please,” turning to me suddenly, “will you step into Miss Baskerville’s room now?”

I followed him with alacrity. Another turn of the spiral staircase, and along a dusty passage choked with properties, and then I was before a door, on which my sister’s assumed name was inscribed in Roman capitals.

My guide knocked, and the voice I knew so well now said, “Come in.”

I turned the handle, and entered with faltering steps and swimming eyes; and my sister Katie, the girl long lost to me and strangely found, rose in her last stage-dress and came in her tinsel glitter towards me with arms extended, and her face full of joy and sorrow. She took me to her breast as though, like my father, she

thought that I was the one who needed consolation most, and kissed me many times.

“My poor dear Faith, how glad I am to see you!” she exclaimed.

## CHAPTER XV.

## A SISTERS' MEETING.

DESPITE all the strange surroundings of my sister's life, of which the reader perceives I had taken too exaggerated a view—seeing the worst in them, and fearing the worst from them—I was glad to clasp Katie to my heart again. For an instant I forgot everything save that she was in her rightful place—that we were together once more, after all the difficulties in the way—and that it was her face looking into mine, with much of the old love upon it that I was assured would never die away. Then the truth came swiftly back upon me, and I murmured—

“Oh, Katie!—why have you taken to this dreadful life?”

“My dear little goose, it’s not dreadful,” she answered, “it is an honest mode of living, and I am forced to live. I’ll tell you about it presently—you must tell me of yourself to begin with. You came back from Pietermaritzburg before the letters reached you telling you to stop—I did not think of that—before the news of father’s disgrace followed that nonsense of his, which deceived us both. What have you been doing—when did you come?—oh, my good gracious, child! why are you dressed like this?”

“I found my father in prison, and you away from the old home—and there was nothing left, Katie, but to wait for the friends who never came to help me.”

“And you waited till it came to poverty—I see—I know,” said Katie, indignantly; “what a shame!—what a struggle yours must have been, without courage to face the world, and with your worldly knowledge based on Uncle Jef’s old-fashioned notions—my dear, dear

Faith, why were you in such haste to meet this misery?"

"I believed in the good news," I answered, making no reply to Katie's estimate of my powers, and thinking again how like it was, in its way, to my father's ideas conveyed behind the wire grating of his cage.

"Yes, exactly," said Katie; "but I wish that you had not been in a hurry, although the hurry has brought you to me. We need not part again, and we will be such true friends one to another. Oh! Faith, I have wanted one true friend so much."

"You will trust in me, then?"

"To be sure I will."

And once more her arms were round me, and her kisses falling on my cheeks.

"You will let me advise you for your good?—tell you what I think is right and what is wrong?—teach you, in my simple earnest way, even as I used to do in Dorset Street."

"Oh, I know right from wrong, and the mighty difference there is between them," was the quick, half laughing answer; "and as for

advice—why, if I take any, I shall probably take yours. We will advise each other presently—not now.”

“But this life—this awful life—then——”

“Yes—yes—you have said that before,” said Katie with impatience, “and we will argue that out in a few minutes, and,” she added with a little emphasis, “in a few words. Wait here, dear.”

She passed into a small inner room, and before I had time to ponder over our meeting, she was back again, clad in a heavy black silk dress, and shawl, with a dark hat and feather surmounting her brown hair.

“I have learned the art of dressing rapidly, Faith—and that for a lady is a great accomplishment. And now, my dear little serious missionary of a sister,” she added, laying her gloved hands on my shoulders and approaching her bright face close to mine, “you must defer all talk of this life until we are at home—not tease me about it here.”

“I will not tease you at all, if I can help it.”

“That’s a dear Faith,” and she kissed me

again before she withdrew her hands from my shoulders. "You will come straight home with me, of course. You look tired and ill—you must have suffered a great deal."

"A great deal of anxiety concerning you, and——"

"And that being over, you will be yourself again—another Kirby not wholly trodden underfoot," she said, suddenly compressing her red lips together ; "a something like myself—strong, resolute, and able to fight your own battle."

"I think I can do that."

"That's well."

She regarded me very critically for a few moments, then she said,

"You are like me, I should say—a great deal. Neither of us is a giantess," she said, laughing, "but we are *petite*, and sweetly genteel!"

I tried to smile at her high spirits, but it was a poor attempt, and her life and light depressed me, despite my efforts to the contrary. She was satisfied with the sphere into which she had plunged, and more than satisfied with the popu-



larity which her singing and acting had attained for her. That was my greatest trouble, and my busy brain was already scheming how to lure her from it.

"Give me your address, Katie," I said, "and I will be with you early in the morning."

"In the morning?"

"Yes; I must return to Dorset Street to-night."

"Why—you are not at the old house?"

"Yes, I am."

"With that snappish Mrs. Simmons—ah! she has told you some fine stories about me. How I detest that woman!"

"A good woman at heart, Katie," I replied; "don't be hard upon her. She did not forget me when I had no more money, but gave me the shelter of her home just the same."

"You must have got over her very nicely somehow," replied Katie. "I could never agree with her for five minutes together. But you shall not go back to-night—I say, Faith, that you shall never, never leave me again—there!"

"Mrs. Simmons will sit up all night for me."

"Write her a letter and tell her that you have found me. There's pen and ink—I'll see some one is sent with it directly—you need not be afraid of that. Why, Faith," perceiving that I hesitated, "you can't like me as you used, if you want to run away from me so soon."

"I will write," I said. "I can see Mrs. Simmons in a few days—I shall be one less in Dorset Street, and that will be a relief now."

"Tell Mrs. Simmons that I haven't forgotten the rent," said Katie, "and that she shall have the whole of it on Monday. I have been going to send it many times, but something has always stopped me. What a shocking thing rent is, Faith—and especially back rent!"

"Ay, it is."

"There! write your letter, and come to me in the green-room. You can find your way back?"

"Are you going there?"

"Yes—such fun!—Mr. Pounce will drive us home in his trap—his advertisement trap I call

it—I promised to go with him, and he is waiting.”

“I will not go with him—I don’t like that man,” I said quickly.

“Hush, hush! my ‘dresser’ is in the next room,” said Katie, lowering her voice and betraying some alarm at my frank speaking; “neither do I, for he’s the most conceited ape that ever breathed, but it is my business, my existence, to please those people who can advance my interests. Pounce is the great man—he is coining money with his impudence and his coster’s voice—he will take a music-hall of his own soon—and I must not make that man my enemy. Try and understand that my position is not secure enough to show my likes and dislikes. I wish it were, I would surprise a few of them.”

“But, Katie—is this life——”

“There, there! when we get home—not now,” she cried, interrupting me, “it’s a compact signed and sealed between us. Oblige me in everything, and follow my lead in everything, until that home is reached, my dear.

It's for the best, or I would not ask you—really.”

“Very well,” I answered with a sigh.

When she had left me, I wondered if her will had mastered mine, if her strong urgent nature had got the better of my resistance, or I had only given way a little to oblige one whom I had not seen for years before this meeting. It mattered not how it was—the times were changing; I had found Kate Kirby, and should be of service to her. She had spoken of the need of one true friend, and of looking forward to that friend in me—that was a good beginning of our lives together. Presently this strange, artificial, enervating life we should leave behind together too—I prayed so even then again.

I wrote my letter to Mrs. Simmons very hastily, perhaps very incoherently, for I was anxious to be quit of the Hall of Harmony, and at home with Katie, facing the truth. I told Mrs. Simmons that I had discovered my sister, and that she had insisted upon taking me home with her—and I added that I should call in a

day or two, and relate the facts. I should have added Katie's address had I known it, but she had left the room without apprising me, and I did not care to date from the Hall of Harmony. I said nothing of the means by which I had found Katie—I left all to the next meeting—and for Mrs. Simmons's past kindness I dashed off a few lines of grateful thanks, feeling that the Dorset Street struggles were over for good, and that a new life had commenced, as full of mystery and uncertainty as the past had been, dating from the day of my return to England. Having placed the note in the envelope, I left Katie's dressing-room and found my way to the apartment which I had recently quitted.

Katie was waiting for me, with a glass of sherry and a biscuit before her—the gift of the liberal Mr. Baxter—and Mr. Baxter was relating an anecdote to her and Mr. Pounce, with much unction and gesticulation, the latter gentleman listening condescendingly, and playing with his whip again.

“This is my particular friend, Miss Kirby,”

said Katie—"one whom I have been waiting years to see—the best little woman in the world."

I did not admire her style of introduction; I was surprised at her making no allusion to our relationship, but I had promised her her own way to-night in everything.

Mr. Pounce bowed stiffly, as if he had never seen me before, and Mr. Baxter shook hands and blessed me, and expressed his great delight at making the acquaintance of any friend of Miss Baskerville's; and then Kate rose and said that she was ready, after first impressing Mr. Baxter with the fact that she wanted some one to take a letter to Dorset Street immediately—a wish which that gentleman promised to see carried out under his own personal superintendence. We left Mr. Baxter with the letter in the green-room, and descended the spiral staircase. Katie turned and spoke to me with her finger on her lip—

"I did not say you were my sister, Faith."

"No—why not?"

"I thought you might not like it," was the

reply, "that you might be ashamed to own that you had a sister here."

"Oh, Katie!"

"It isn't a reproach, but sober earnest, child."

We were passing the door-keeper's den again; the Colossal Pounce swaggered by without any notice of Mr. Jenkins cowering by the fire, Katie said "Good evening," and he answered "Good evening, my lady," as though she were a countess; and then we sallied from the Hall of Harmony into the dark court and the narrow street beyond, where Mr. Pounce's equipage was blocking up three-fourths of the roadway.

"Here he is! Hurray, Tommy Pounce!—and, oh! here's Katie Baskywill with him!"—"Here they all are!"—"Who's the gal in brown?" were a few of the salutations that met us, and that brought the colour to my cheeks, as we passed through a crowd of unwashed tatterdemalions towards the drag, where, to my astonishment, two men in livery were standing. It was a grand show for so poor a neighbourhood, which might well have been stirred to its depths by the display. The comic singer was



a king on this side of the water, and the extravagant game he was playing might possibly be worth the candle. They talked of Tommy Pounce's trap in the vicinity of all the music-halls where Pounce bawled night after night his meaningless trash, and it was evident how great a man he was by the rush of the "ragged fringe" to catch a glimpse of him. The police pushed back the most forward of the crew, but touched their helmets respectfully to Tommy. The shopkeepers left their counters, and came to the door to see him off; the boys cheered a little, a few derisively, as if satire had come early to them, and they knew Mr. Pounce's worth better than he knew his own.

"What a nuisance this is!—haven't you seen enough of me inside?" said Pounce, in loud tones of protest—his breast swelling with gratification for all that.

"We haven't been in, Tommy," a shrill voice replied.

"Then go in on Monday and make up for it."

There was a general laugh at this. What a funny, free-and-easy, jolly fellow this great man



was! No stuck-up airs, no holding himself aloof from his admirers.

"Give us a horder then, old bloke," shrieked another *gamin*, at whose legs Tommy cut playfully with his whip, as he ascended the box, followed by one of his grooms. The second had already installed us in the interior of the trap—far too roomy, and breezy, and conspicuous a vehicle for the night—and had taken his place on the back steps. The horses pranced and shook their heads, and then were off, dashing along without any regard for the lives and limbs of Her Majesty's subjects, who were thick in the murky streets. A parting cheer from the boys made me lower my head quickly with confusion, although I tried hard to conceal any signs of my distress from Katie. She must not know how weak I was, and how all the strangeness of that night had unnerved me.

I felt her hand press mine.

"This is not very elegant, Faith," she said, in a quick whisper, "but it's a great compliment from the Colossal, and it suits my purpose to be

complimented. Still, for all that, he's an ignorant cur, and I hate him!"

"Are you all right there, ladies?" asked the ignorant cur suddenly, looking over his shoulder at us.

"Yes, thank you, Mr. Pounce," replied Katie, in a soft and pleasant voice; "and not at all nervous. How beautifully you drive!"

"Yes, I manage them pretty well now," he said, after bringing us against a kerb-stone with a force that jerked the groom off the steps, who quickly recovered himself, and came back to his post with his hat covered with mud—"but I shall drop the game soon. Baxter likes it, and pays extra for it, but I'm blest if it's a good thing for my throat."

"Ah! you must take care of that," said Katie, demurely.

She made a wry face towards me at the same time, but I could not smile yet; my head seemed to bend lower and lower in spite of me. All was so unreal about me still, so full of deceit, and devoid of any honest instinct, that I felt that I should never understand this world

into which I had followed Katie, or be happy again until I had led her from it, and from the many dangers by which it was hemmed in.

## CHAPTER XVI.

## KATIE'S HOME.

OUR way lay over one of the bridges, and towards Charing Cross. In the broad thoroughfares we attracted considerable attention, being out of place with the hour and the season; people stopped to look after us, and to wonder, as well they might, what was meant by it. If there were any bystanders to enlighten the most curious, why, so much the better for the Hall of Harmony and the Colossal Pounce—it was a step nearer immortality. Pounce did not speak much during the drive; he had his horses on his mind, and they were fresh and restive; but when we were proceeding up St.

Martin's Lane, he gave the reins to the groom beside him, and coolly clambered over to us.

"I say, Katie, you'll turn up to-morrow at old Grew's party?" he asked, as he sat down facing her.

"No, I shall not be able to come," said Katie.

"Oh! confound it, I hope you will," Pounce continued; "it's the only day we can get a little talk together, and there'll be lots of people you'll like to meet."

"I am very sorry, but I am engaged."

"You've got over that nonsense about Sunday parties now? It's all very fine for people to talk of Sunday as they do, who can meet any day in the week they like—ain't it, miss?"

This was addressed to me, and I said—

"I have been brought up to regard Sunday with some degree of reverence."

"Oh! have you? Well—you're lucky," he resumed, after considering my answer for a moment. "I was brought up like it too, but in my profession I found it impossible to study that game."

I was about to answer him again, with all the fervour born of my four years' apprenticeship to Uncle Jef, when I felt Katie's hand pressing my arm, and I stopped for her sake. I had no hope of making a convert of Tommy Pounce—and, after a moment's reflection, no desire to argue with him. He turned to Katie, and expressed a wish that she would think better of it, and look in at Grew's, if it were only for a minute—everybody expected her, and a good engagement might come of it, he added significantly. Katie was firm on this occasion, and said "No," very decisively; and Mr. Pounce looked for an instant aggrieved, and finally crestfallen.

"I made sure that you would come, or I wouldn't have gone near 'em—upon my soul I wouldn't," he said in conclusion; then he sprang up and launched so formidable an oath at the driver for going the wrong way, that it curdled the blood in my veins, and made me shrink closer to my sister.

"Didn't I tell you that I wanted to go to Long Acre—what are you passing the place

for, you infernal fool?" he roared; and he continued to curse his coachman until we turned and drew up before a big block of buildings in the locality referred to.

"Here?" I said.

"Yes—my nest is up there on the second floor, Faith.

"On a second floor, for ever more,  
You must live and die with Katie.'"

"I wish you had said as much to me," said Pounce, gallantly; and Katie laughed, and told him not to be foolish; and so the bad temper or the disappointment of the Colossal vanished away at parting. Katie let herself in with a latch-key after we had bidden Mr. Pounce good night, and closing the door behind us, she led the way up a broad but indifferently clean flight of stairs to her own room. A light tap at the first door on the second-floor brought a smart-looking servant-maid to admit us, and I was in Katie's home at last—a bright, well-furnished suite of rooms, wherein Katie bustled to and fro with all her old vivacity.

“Now, Faith, before supper you must tell me of yourself,” she said, “and afterwards you may lecture me. That is a fair division of labour, before we talk of what is to become of us.”

If her light vein jarred upon me, I was glad to witness it. She was happy—the family trouble had not affected her seriously; she had shaken it off along with her old name. And yet perhaps it was my presence that gave her new life that night, for as she passed from one room to another, she would touch my shoulder lightly, or rest her hand upon my hair, saying more than once, “I am so glad to see your dear old face—I am not alone now, am I?”

The maid was sent on various errands connected with supper for an extra and unlooked-for personage, and Katie was busy herself seeing that the table was laid completely to her satisfaction, making numerous inquiries about me and my past life, as she tripped about the room. Before the supper was over—and an expensive supper of cold fowl and ham from the pastrycook’s it proved to be, startling my sense of economy a great deal—I had related



all the news of my return to London, the disappointment which had met me at the offices of Westmair and Co., the life in Dorset Street, where I had struggled against misfortune, and looked round vainly for my sister. Katie listened with attention, but did not make many comments upon my narrative. In those parts which told of my trouble, she stretched forth her hand and touched mine in sympathy; when the name of Dick Simmons was mentioned, she smiled and shrugged her shoulders; and when I had concluded, she sat silent for a while, considering the whole position, and taking her cue from it.

"It will be my turn now," said Katie, "when Mary has gone to her room for good. See—I put off the evil day as long as I can. Philosophy, Faith—not cowardice."

We were sitting before the fire together at last, and I was thinking what a graceful and beautiful girl she had grown,—with only seventeen years of life to her credit, I did not consider her a woman,—when she said suddenly,

"You are not one-and-twenty yet, Faith."

"No—not yet."

"Not of age," she added lightly, "so you must not rebuke too severely one who never took kindly to advice. In the language of the law, we are both infants, dear."

"Oh! but I am three years and a half older than you," I said, "and have a right to advise you."

"I don't question the right, only the necessity," replied Katie; "for of the two, who knows more of life, do you think?"

"Of this life—you," I answered with a sigh.

"Very well," she said quickly, "and that is my sphere, wherein I have to fight my way for myself and—for you."

"Oh! not for me," I cried.

"You see danger in my profession, Faith—I do not disguise the fact that there *is* danger, but not to me," she said. "I faced the world so early, father left me so completely alone, that I have been for years on self-defence. There! you need not fear for me."

"You like it—you are happy in it—and oh! you are so young!"

"Sometimes I think that I am a little old woman in disguise," she answered; "I am so calculating as to my chances, so very mercenary and hard! No—not very young, Faith."

She looked older as she spoke, with her large hazel eyes fixed upon the firelight.

"What made you think of this?"

"What was I to think, when the truth suddenly came out that father had been taking the Westmairs' money? I was as alone in the world as you were yesterday, and there was no one to offer me," she added, with bitterness, "a life more *respectable*. I had a voice—one of my pupils had not wholly failed in this profession that alarms you—I was young, and not particularly a fright—I had always had my nerves under control, and I thought of the hated music-halls as an escape from drudgery."

"Well?" I said breathlessly.

"I asked my old pupil to allow me to sing for her benefit, as a Miss Baskerville from America——"

"Oh!" I exclaimed.

"Courage! in misfortune, as in war, every-

thing is fair. I had immense confidence in myself," she said, speaking with volubility, "and was determined to succeed by every means in my power. I fought hard, Faith, and made my first appearance with success—think of that! *success* in these sceptical times—and was engaged from that night at a fair salary. I dare say if I had failed I should have killed myself," she added, with a momentary contraction of her forehead, "but I did not think that I should give way. It all seemed very easy to me."

"Easy!—at your age, and with your inexperience?"

"I knew that I could sing and dance—and a little voice and a great deal of impudence make a tremendous way with the patrons of these places. Look at that wretched and illiterate Pounce who drove us home; he would make his fortune if his love of display did not lead him to spend his money as fast as he earns it. I tried comic singing, comic dancing, anything to attract applause from people whom a little pleased, and the result is that I am enabled to earn my own living. I was a professional

from America—not a *débutante*—and Tilly and I played our cards well, and deceived the wise-aces for once. I know you don't like deceit—neither do I, for deceit's sake—but it was my one hope, and I could not shut my eyes to it and starve, as Faith Kirby would have done.”

“Yes,” I said thoughtfully, “I would have preferred to starve, Kate.”

“I think you would, but I am calculating, vain, bold—I long to resist trouble, not succumb to it,” she cried; “I can't lie down and be trampled upon by the rush of a crowd too busy to pick me up and ask what is the matter with me.”

She was speaking excitedly, with her little white hands clasped, and her eyes flashing with that fire at her heart which fluttered the bosom of her dress; and I could but own how stronger and more persevering a nature hers was than mine, even if in owning it I sorrowed for it. More than that, I confessed to myself that she was an enigma to me—that I did not understand her—and that in her misdirected power and energy I saw a great deal to deplore. I was bewildered

that night; she over-mastered me—I could not see my way for her good, or my own—I sat baffled by her side.

“Ah, Faith!” she said, stealing her arms round my neck after a long silence, and drawing my head upon her breast, as I had drawn hers before I went away, “you think that I am a very scheming and ill-principled young woman—I am not that, I hope, although I know one so much better than myself that I can hardly look into her eyes. You think that I am happy in this life, but I have only forced myself to be content with it.”

“Would you be glad if I followed in your steps? I have a small voice of my own too—I used to lead the chapel-singing in Pietermaritzburg.”

I said this to try her, and she answered quickly and warmly,

“No—God forbid! You could not stoop to win your way—you are nervous and would die of shame at the first sight of a half-drunken mob before you—you are not funny, and I am!”

She uttered these last words with more bit-

terness still, as though the relation of her story had deepened her intensity of feeling.

"I shall never be happy again, Kate, till I have rescued you from this."

"You rescue me!" she said in a pitying tone; "ah! how is that possible?"

"Till you have rescued yourself then—oh, Katie! you will try to do that?"

"I am trying," she replied—"that is, when I can escape this life I will. I despise the people by whom I am surrounded, them and their lies, and lives. But the old question will come uppermost. What can I do?"

It was a question that puzzled me, and I was silent. She noticed my sad looks, as with her natural quickness she appeared to notice everything, and said quickly—

"The story is ended, and we shall not dwell upon it again. The life is not such a horrible one as you fancy—there is attraction in it—and everybody is in too much of a hurry to interfere with you. Do you understand me?"

"I think I do."

"And now shall we say Amen to all the past, Faith?"



"Not yet."

"Not yet!" she echoed in surprise; "why, we are not going to begin again, I hope."

"No; but there is much that perplexes me—much that has been said against you."

"You mean that Mrs. Simmons has said the worst of me that she could—oh! never mind her."

"So good and true a woman is she in many things, Kate, that I have been sorry for her hard words respecting you."

"What does she know of me?" cried Kate, indignantly. "I deceived her about the rent a little, because father deceived me—and when she spoke her mind, I spoke mine in return."

"Oh, Katie! she lays the blame of her son's drunkenness, the great change that has come to him, at your door."

"That is like a mother," said Katie. "I couldn't help it if that weak-minded fellow chose to pay me attention. I kept him in his place as long as I could, considering that we were living in the same house, but I didn't wish to make him an enemy as well as his mother."



A selfish calculation, but I *am* calculating, and I liked poor Dick for many things. He knew my profession and never told anybody—and, though he has haunted me night after night wherever I have sung, he promised me when I went away to keep my secret always, and he has done so. If he had betrayed me to his mother, I should have had her persecuting me for arrears.”

“He knew all, then—and yet he saw that my anxiety concerning you was killing me.”

“He never speaks to me—he hasn’t done so for months. I told him that if he talked any more nonsense I should hate him, and that if he were silent I would meet him some day and be friends with him, just as we used to be.”

I thought of the first meeting in the fog.

“And you intended to keep that promise?”

“Yes,” replied Katie, “some very long day hence, when he had cured himself of all his maudlin sentiments. He is very foolish. He spent half his wages following me about, until I got him on the free list of some of the places at which I sing. He was grateful, it bribed

him into silence, and I was left in peace."

"What a study all this has been!" I said.

"I found it hard to save money—harder to part with it to pay father's debts," said Katie. "Something was alway turning up to rob me of that which I had put by—either a dress that I fancied, or some one wanting money of me to stave off a claim; but it has been always on my mind to pay Mrs. Simmons, and I have made many efforts. Give me credit for them, Faith. I began to save again when I was in the provinces, and next week she *shall* have her money—there! What are you brooding upon now?"

"How to get you away," I answered.

"What, still! after you have asked me to save myself, as the task was beyond you? Why, Faith, I have to think of you first."

"Not yet—not to-night."

"My self-possession, self-assertion, worldliness, amaze you?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied frankly.

"There is a great deal of show in it," she said in a whisper, as if she were afraid that her maid should hear her and betray her. "I try hard to

be worldly; that is, I scheme and plot for and against many things, for rivals, detractors, and calumniators are on every side of me. I fight hard battles with adversity, and win many of them; but I am very weary of this, for all my talk, my dear."

It was her turn to lay her head upon my breast, and let me soothe her there. She looked at last like the child whom I had left behind.

"I wonder what would have happened had I never gone away," I murmured.

"Why did you go?" she asked, in a low tone; then, before I could reply, she started from my arms, and dashed a tear or two from her eyes, as if ashamed of the weakness.

"There is one way out of this life!" she cried.

"What is that?"

"For some one to marry me—some poor fool of the Dick Simmons class of brain," she said scornfully, "who, full of my imaginary virtues, and attracted by my voice, or style, or face, should fall in love with me. Some one like Dick, only handsomer and richer. Actresses and singers have their admirers and silent wor-

shippers, and I am not without them. That bouquet was sent to-night from some one who haunts me as Dick has done—some one who pays me pretty compliments. You see, instead of a worldly woman for a sister, you have one very childish and romantic.”

“Are you laughing at me, or is this sober reality?”

“Neither; only a foolish dream, Faith,” she answered quickly. “There, it vanishes away!”

She sprang up, and shook her hands in the air, as though she shook away a fancy born of folly, and flitted about the room again, dismissing tacitly the one great subject with which her heart and mine were full. I did not know then that she had dismissed it for ever, that for once and all she had told her story, listened to my weak arguments, and overpowered me with her defence. When I re-approached the subject it was in her room, and she was jesting as pleasantly as if no trouble at her heart were heavier than the thistledown. She stopped me very quickly.

“We are not going to talk of this any more,

until you or I can change it, Faith," she said—"never any more."

It was a firm, fair face into which I looked, and though I rebelled against the interdict I did not dispute it. I was glad to be at rest, to feel that I had found my darling, to be convinced by my own sanguine nature that, whatever might be the constitution of her world, or of its innumerable temptations, I was once more a friend at her side, and that she was glad to have me there.



BOOK II.

THE SISTERS.

VOL. I.

Q





## CHAPTER I.

## ANOTHER BEGINNING.

TO say that in sharing Katie's life, or in taking my place in Katie's home, I ever settled down, would be a mis-statement of the facts. There was no settling down in this unreal sphere, for there was no becoming used to it. If I felt myself growing with every day more powerless to act, I felt none the less the impracticability of reconciling myself to all the vanities by which I was surrounded. I do not seek to convey the impression that I was a very religious girl, or that I was as perfectly right as Katie was completely wrong. I was a woman of many faults, Heaven knows. My religion was a second-hand one, modelled on Uncle Jef's—a religion that did not make much

allowance for the contrarieties of our poor humanity, and was in its way narrow and ascetical. Probably it was based also on a very good opinion of myself, for had I not my vanities also in the early days of my return to England? I thought that I must be right in many things, and I had the impression that people would own I was right, and act as I wished them, after a careful deliberation on the matter of my argument. Therein I was deceived, as might have been expected from the outset. No one thought of me much; the few who did—my father and Katie—considered me a helpless kind of young woman, requiring much support and kindness; of my power to influence others, or to turn others to my way of thinking, I had no outward and visible proof. Katie was affectionate and good-tempered, but firm; she would not listen to my reasonings; on the night we first met, she had answered me, and there was an end of it. When things could be altered in any way, or by any means, then would be the time to give up the present life; but till the opportunity presented itself, it was

no use making her unhappy. She would not starve for a theory; she was earning her own living; when there was a higher mode of fulfilling that important mission, she would not be blind to the advantage of adopting it. Meanwhile, let her be.

Not seeing my way ahead, all being impenetrable, I did not preach to Katie on the moral disadvantages of her profession. I was not "a worry;" I could only watch anxiously for something better in the future, and pray that it might take us presently from the miserable little world which I could not help despising.

With that world I could not mix. It was on all sides repellent to me, and though I generally accompanied Katie from one music-hall to another, I made no friends or acquaintances, and I kept to my sister's dressing-rooms until it was time to leave, shuddering at her costumes and hating her profession with every hour of my life. The people who seemed her friends, and who called her "Katie dear," were my especial abhorrence, disguise the fact as I might for Katie's sake. There were good, bad,

and indifferent in their midst, the indifferent predominating; but I distrusted all of them, and saw danger to Katie in their acquaintance. They seemed to live solely for the applause of the crowd; they sang, danced, and grimaced for it, and in their poor conceits they considered it the praise of the great public. The hooting of a mob of boys and girls, of half-tipsy clerks and men about town, was the sweet incense of adulation for which they strove with an eagerness that was remarkable, deplorable, and yet so natural! The more I looked round me, the less I was surprised at my sister's success. Katie was a clever actress—not a genius, but she had a power of conceiving character, and was gifted with a sweet young voice that might have been trained to nobler uses and higher successes—and those by whom she was surrounded were, for the most part, vain and ignorant people, with abilities of so common an order that even mediocrity took high honours amongst them, and made itself popular by sheer force of contrast with the incapable.

Katie studied hard. I had not been many

days with her before I was surprised at her indefatigability; at the house she would practise her songs at the piano, and rehearse her characters before the cheval glass in her bedroom.

"This sort of thing generally leads to the stage, Faith," she condescended to explain; "the best of us drift off to the legitimate burlesque."

"Is that your ambition?" I asked sadly.

"My ambition is to rise somehow," she replied decisively, "and I think that I shall succeed. Have I not two to care for now?"

And here her arms were round me in her natural impulsiveness.

"Oh, Katie!" I said, returning her caress, "that will not be for long. This is only my halting-place, until I recover breath to fight my second battle. I must not be dependent upon you, and upon this life,"

"How proud you are!" cried Katie. "When you are rich, I will not mind being supported in the least. You and I, Faith, for each other."

"I hope so—always."

Perhaps I was not so sanguine concerning that idea as I had been only a few days back. I did not see how to support Katie. I was determined that Katie should not support me long by singing at a music-hall. That had become a shame which kindled the colour in my face with every passing word concerning it. I analysed the newspaper advertisements every morning still, answering a few, whilst Katie shrugged her shoulders at my efforts.

"I know what unprofitable work that is," she said; "and, my dear Faith, where are your references?"

"They will come presently from Pietermaritzburg."

"No one will believe in Pietermaritzburg—and meanwhile?"

"Meanwhile I vouch for part of my story, and ask for time to prove the rest."

"You are wasting more of that material than you are likely to have granted you," said Katie, drily.

"I would not mind a situation at a milliner's; I think that I might work my way there."

“Work your way into your grave, you mean.”

“I have an idea of opening a school.”

“Schools take years to establish,” replied my sister. “When I have saved some money—and I am going to save tremendously—you shall hear of *my* plans.”

“Tell me what they are now?”

“No—not yet,” she answered laughingly.

I was surprised at the extent of Katie’s income, when she had informed me one day of the sum realised by her singing nightly at three establishments. There was enough and to spare, though she was not coining money as rapidly as Tommy Pounce was.

“Everybody tells me how cheap I am at the price,” she said, “but no one sees that I am feeling my way—paving the ground for higher salaries, and larger letters in the bills! Presently I will be terribly extortionate, Faith; for the more that is earned, the sooner I am quit of the profession.”

“Ah, you say that to please me,” I cried.

“No; I *don’t intend*,” she added with emphasis, “to be Katie Baskerville all my life; I keep my



eyes open—nothing escapes them ; I am a horrid little lynx at heart.”

“But——”

“But we have given up argument about it,” she said. “It is understood that a big stone is set over it, until you or I can roll it away. I am a woman of business.”

In many respects she was business-like. She answered her letters with despatch ; she made her engagements in a smart, business-like way, and entered them in a small pocket diary, neatly ruled and lettered for the purpose. She was always full of bustle and life, a clear-headed, clear-sighted, worldly little woman, who I began to think would have succeeded in most things on which she had set her heart. But she was not all that I could have wished, and I was thankful that I was at her side, capable in one direction, at least, of exerting some small influence. For instance—a fortnight had elapsed, when I ventured to remind her of her past promise to repay our family debt to Mrs. Simons.

“Oh ! I had forgotten that dreadful woman,”



she said peevishly, as she beat her little hands together for an instant; "I would have put her off for ever so long, till I could have paid her without missing the money."

"She took pity on me, Kate," I said.

"Then I'll forgive her, and pay her to-day—the crab-apple!" said Katie, starting up. "You must make haste, Faith, or all my good resolutions will ooze out at my fingers'-ends."

Possibly her good resolutions did, for when a Hansom cab was proceeding down Dorset Street—Katie would have a Hansom, as the most expeditious method of reaching the old home—she said,

"We're in a great hurry to fling good money away, and to have impudence back for our pains. Don't you think that Mrs. Simmons might wait another week?"

"I think that she has waited too long already."

"I try to pay my own debts, but when it comes to father's it is a little hard."

"We are all of one family."

"Oh, good gracious! you'll want me to pay

something for Uncle Jef next, or perhaps make good to the Westmairs all that father took."

"If you and I could do that, Katie—if we only could, it would make amends for a great deal."

"Those poor Westmairs were badly treated—I do wish they may get it, certainly."

I looked quickly into her face, but it was a quiet little face enough—only the tone of her voice had startled me with its irony, or its jest at an affliction which had nearly broken my heart. Perhaps I had been mistaken, for she said afterwards in a more natural tone,

"I shall be glad to see father soon. I don't think his strength will keep up against prison fare and prison rules. His was always a weak constitution."

We were at Mrs. Simmons's door before I could reply, and Mrs. Simmons's face was pressed against the window-glass, first in curiosity, and then in blank astonishment. It was Mrs. Simmons, baby in arms, who opened the street-door and asked us to walk in—who would not have shaken hands with me in her parlour,

had I not offered my own and insisted upon it—who rather demurred to my kissing her baby, as it had “only just gone off to sleep,” she said—and who regarded Katie with a stony stare far from indicative of any friendly feeling towards her.

“I didn’t think to see you again, after frightening me with a letter at twelve o’clock that Saturday night,” said Mrs. Simmons; “but it’s better late than never, I s’pose.”

“I have not been ungrateful—I have been thinking of you a great deal,” I replied.

“It’s quite natural you should have gone to her,” said Mrs. Simmons, “but hardly that she should have been glad to——”

Here she paused, probably out of a faint degree of respect for her visitor’s feelings, for she did not complete her sentence, but inquired, with a little sniff, if we had called for anything in particular.

“We have called to pay the back rent, and all back claims,” said Katie, petulantly. “Will you state what they are, please?”

“You know them as well as I do, I dare say.”

"No, I do not."

"Well, there's thirteen pounds six shillings for the rent."

"And my sister's board and lodging until she went away?" inquired Katie.

"I've nothing to charge for that." Here Mrs. Simmons set her lips together, and looked sourer than ever.

"I would prefer to pay in full of all demands, Mrs. Simmons," said Katie.

"Why?" was the short question asked.

"You will be saying presently that she went away in your debt, ungrateful for everything you had done for her; but neither she nor I wish to be indebted to you."

"I shall never say a word against *her*," said Mrs. Simmons, with emphasis, and without casting a glance in my direction; "she's the best of you Kirbys, and she did the best for me in my trouble, as I hope I did for her."

I replied that I was sure she did, and was about to add that still the debt of obligation remained, when she said more harshly,

"Don't you say a word about it to me, I don't

want to hear it. If you're dead set on paying me back, do it in some other way than money, which you may be able to do—which I may even ask you to do, if I live. You'll not be always with your sister—she's one easily tired of everybody."

"Oh, Faith is a shocking trial to me—so dreadfully good—so very unlike me!" cried Katie, laughing the more heartily as Mrs. Simmons's brow contracted with the hilarity manifested.

It was an unpleasant and unsatisfactory meeting, and I was glad when it was at an end. There was no power of mine, or upon earth, to make Mrs. Simmons friends with Kate Kirby. They were utterly opposed to each other—irreconcilable atoms of humankind, impossible to coalesce. Mrs. Simmons did not even thank her for the money of which she had long ago despaired, and which fell like golden manna upon the poverty-haunted domicile in Dorset Street. She took it as her legal right, and wrote out her receipt with formality, and with much spluttering of ink, and a general smear-

ing of the document and the baby, her infant being clutched to her breast, and writing not being an art in which she had ever excelled.

Then we went away—Katie flouncing out a few moments before me, without saying good morning to her old landlady. As she passed out of the parlour Mrs. Simmons said quickly,

“This is your doings, Faith.”

“No. She had always made up her mind to pay you.”

“I don’t believe it,” was the flat denial. “But there, she’s your relation—not mine, thank goodness!”

“How is your son?” I asked, anxious to change the subject of discourse.

“About the same,” she answered. “Was it you that followed him after all? Where did he go? How did you find your sister out? He tells me nothing.”

“Don’t ask me. I would rather not say yet awhile.”

“You are ashamed of her already?” she cried.

“No; that is unjust, but I can’t explain now. She would not wish me.”

"Oh, if you have got to study her, you're in for a fine thing," said Mrs. Simmons, with her old impatient jerk of the chin that I knew so well.

"Good-bye," I said. "You are not angry with me?"

"Angry with you, girl? No. But I shall never have patience with that other one."

"Ah, you don't understand her."

She stood up and kissed me, and a few moments afterwards I was closing the door of the house in Dorset Street behind me. It was going away in earnest from the old home and the old life.

"I told you how it would be," said Katie when I had re-entered the cab with her. "I have flung away my money, and been insulted for my pains. What a little fool I was to pay her a penny!"

"I don't think so," I answered.

"Well, there's an end to the Dorset Street den," she said after a short silence, "and I am glad of that at least."

"We were born there, you and I. I was your

governess, and almost your mother, in those upstairs rooms, for thirteen years, Kate."

"So you were," she answered in a different tone; "I have not forgotten it. I should have been a worse woman long ago, Faith, if I had not remembered it at times."

She was very thoughtful till we emerged into the broader thoroughfare of Fleet Street; then the light mood rippled to the surface, born as it were of the busy life about us, and which she seemed to love. She hummed the air of her last serio-comic ballad as we were driven home to Long Acre.



## CHAPTER II.

## THREE LETTERS.

WITH the next five months of my life I need not detain the reader very long. During that period nothing came in my way that offered a chance of taking Katie from her sphere. She was my protectress; I was not hers, as I had hoped to be in the conceit of my superior years. What I should have done without her I often wondered then,—I have often marvelled at since,—and yet I was never wholly grateful for the shelter of her home, and for ever dissatisfied with the means which constituted it a home for both of us. In those five months Katie shifted from one music-hall to another, returning to Mr.

Baxter's more than once, each time with an addition to her salary, which he grumbled at, but invariably consented to, and at which triumph over his exchequer Katie rejoiced a great deal. In those five months I had not received a line from Uncle Jef. Now that there was no reason for Katie's keeping her residence a secret from the Dorset Street folk, I had written to Mrs. Simmons and requested her to forward on all letters for me. I had written also from my new address to Pietermaritzburg, but there had been no answer back. I had called at the office which had first sent out Jeffrey Kirby to the Cape, and they had no reason to believe that anything had happened to him, although he had not, up to the present date, sent back his receipt for the last half-year's salary. That something had happened I was almost certain; but I wrote with every mail, and I kept on hoping for the best.

There had been another visit to Holloway Prison, on this occasion by Katie, who had argued with me that it was her turn, and whom I let go in my place with reluctance.

“He will be glad to see me. He has not seen me since they took him from Dorset Street. Oh, that dreadful night!” said Katie, shuddering. “What would he think if I were to stop away this time?”

She had been the favourite daughter, and what could I say? That I was anxious to note a change for the better in him, and that I was uneasy at his not writing to us, even when the prison rules allowed. I was more likely to render him miserable, Katie thought, and she said what she thought, and then went in my stead.

I was surprised to find how little my sister had to say when she returned, and what a cross and puzzled face it was of hers, rather than of any deep solicitude. She put up with all my eager questioning, though scarcely with an easy grace. The journey had distracted her, and she was irritable.

Had she seen any difference in him? Yes, a great deal. He was in the infirmary ward, and looked close to death's door. Had he said anything about the robbery? Not a word, and she

hadn't been brute enough to mention the subject herself. (This was not intended for a home-thrust, though it came at me like a stab.) Was he hopeful or despondent? Oh! very hopeful in his way; full of his old rubbish about his coming riches, and prophesying wonders before the next two years. Did she tell him what she was doing? Yes—why shouldn't she? Did he seem to mind that? Not at all. Did she mention Uncle Jef to him? No, she forgot it; Uncle Jef never troubled *her* mind, being much too good for her acquaintance. Did she mention me? To be sure, and father was glad to hear that I was in good hands.

These were the principal questions and their answers. There were various little changes rung upon them, till Katie began to read the newspaper over her tea, and to answer absently.

The newspaper helped to turn the conversation effectually.

“Why, Faith, here's an advertisement that might suit you. Shall I read it?”

“If you like.”

Katie read it aloud. It was an advertisement

for a governess and companion to a young lady, and it enumerated in lengthy detail the accomplishments and virtues that would be required of the applicant. It mentioned French, Italian, and German by way of foreign languages, not as deep studies, but as preliminary lessons, leading up to studies under future masters. It emphasised English by adding "sound and good" before it. It dwelt upon music, sacred and secular, and it trusted that no one would apply who was not accustomed to teaching, and had not her heart in her profession. It required authority, but great kindness and much Christianity of feeling; and it mentioned that the very large sum of a hundred and twenty pounds per annum would be given, by way of salary, by X. Y. Z., No. 434, Belgrave Square, to any lady who was really suitable for the post in question.

"I have seen that," I replied, when Katie had finished.

"Have you answered it?"

"No."

"You are tired of this up-hill work—you give

in, and save me a fortune in postage-stamps," cried Katie.

"I have not given in," I answered, with a sigh, "but it does not seem suitable for me."

"Why?"

"It is too big for my capabilities altogether."

"Never think too little of yourself, my sister," answered Katie. "The world takes a poor young person like you at her own valuation."

When Katie had gone away in her hired brougham to the music-halls, whither I did not always accompany her now—having, as it were, more confidence in her powers of taking care of herself—I made up my mind to answer the advertisement which had attracted my sister's notice. I had no belief in my chance, but I wrote under the impression that it was not right to neglect it, and even under the conviction that Katie had called attention to the advertisement in the hope that I should reply to it. Was she growing tired of me? I thought, remembering suddenly Mrs. Simmons's past prophecy—or, better thought than that, was

she more weary of the profession which she had adopted, and would be glad in her heart to give up?

Meanwhile I wrote out my application, told part of my story, hinted that my references were at Pietermaritzburg, spoke of myself in as glowing terms as my modesty would allow, dwelt upon my aptitude for teaching as a strong point, and skimmed lightly over the foreign language clause, French and Italian being partly familiar to me, thanks to a studious uncle's teaching in the South African colony, but German being still an unknown tongue. The letter was sealed and ready for delivery before Katie's return. My sister brought in two letters with her, and stood for a moment regarding my missive with surprise.

"What's that?" she asked—"for me?"

"No. I have answered the advertisement."

"What advertisement?"

I was not surprised at Katie's forgetfulness; I had long ago discovered that hers was not a retentive memory, save in matters exclusively her own, when not an item escaped her. She

had pained me more than once by her aptitude to forget anything that related particularly to me; but then she had enough on her own mind, poor Kate, without thinking deeply of my little cares. It was natural that she should forget them, but I did not see the matter always in its right light, and felt myself aggrieved at times.

“The advertisement for a governess to a young lady,” I replied.

“Ah, yes, I remember,” said Katie, carelessly. “Was it worth replying to? I thought that you did not see the necessity.”

“I thought afterwards that I would write a few lines. Do you know, Katie, I fancied that you wished me?”

Katie had removed her bonnet and cloak, and was sitting in her easy-chair before the fire, a tired beauty, with clasped hands and thoughtful eyes. The two letters that she had brought in with her lay in her lap, one unsealed, the other still unopened. She did not look up as she replied to me.

“I might have had a passing thought that it



was better for you, Faith—that you were not happy here.”

“I am as happy as I can be under circumstances that should keep us both grave,” I said ; “and, of course, I do not like to feel dependent upon you.”

“That’s a right feeling enough. I am not reproaching you,” she answered, still very thoughtfully.

“I would be glad to reverse the position, and have you dependent upon me,” I said.

“I wish to heaven that you could,” she replied, with a flash of energy that died out almost before the last words were spoken, for she sat there thoughtful and apathetic the instant afterwards.

“This grand situation, Katie, for example—this impossible post for which I am applying—why, a hundred and twenty pounds a year would enable you to live quietly in some little place where I could see you very often, and where you could rest apart from this terrible life until an opening as good as mine came to yourself.”

"I should not want *all* your money, Faith ; you could not afford to give it me ; don't talk in that childish fashion ; it is only aggravating."

I was surprised at her petulance.

"I should not want much, and there would be enough for you if——"

"If I were not ambitious," she cried, interrupting me ; "if I had the courage to give up this terrible life, as you call it. Well, Faith, *when* the chance comes, ask me."

"You would not say no !" I exclaimed.

"I don't think that I would," she answered, after a moment's steady survey of the bright red fire, which we were glad to see even in those evenings late in May ; "I should not be sorry to escape ; God knows, I hate them all enough."

It was so seldom that she betrayed any feeling of grief or passion, that the sudden spreading of her hands before her face to hide its agitation from me, was like a new mystery leaping to the foreground.

"Katie, dear, something has happened," I

said, bending over her ; “ will you tell me what it is ? ”

“ Don’t ask me ; it isn’t worth a thought ; I’m a fool, that’s all.”

“ But——”

“ But let me be ; you can’t advise me ; no one can do me any good. Mine is a silly fancy that has died out as it deserved to do. Don’t ask me what it is ; only see, there’s an end of it for ever.”

She suddenly snatched at the open letter in her lap, and thrust it into the fire, so recklessly and with such vehemence that I gave a little scream as the flame flickered at the lace trimming of her sleeve, and scorched a portion of it into tinder.

Her left hand had crushed out every spark immediately ; she was not so alarmed for her safety as I had been.

“ You are nervous, Faith ; I don’t know what I shall do with you presently,” she said with a forced laugh. “ I have only burnt a little of my lace.”

“ And you will not tell me anything, then ? ”  
I asked reproachfully.

“There is so little to tell, Faith,” she replied in her old tones; “and you are so fond of cross-examination in your womanly curiosity, that I never care to begin.”

“I will not cross-examine you at all, if you will give me some idea of your trouble,” I urged. “Why should we have any secrets from each other?”

“I can’t tell,” she answered: “I’m fond of secrets perhaps; I’m not out-spoken, assuredly. But you may know as much as this, that there’s a man at the bottom of it; that I have been inclined to fall in love with him, and that he has had a kind of sneaking fancy for me, and that it is all over.”

“Was it the gentleman who sent the bouquet one night, when you first brought me home?—when you said that you were romantic?”

“What a dreadful memory you have!—you ought to have forgotten all that nonsense.”

“I have often wondered——”

“Yes, I know. You have been always wondering,” she cried. “Well, it was he, and in his way he *was* a gentleman. He found out

that he was too much of a gentleman for my acquaintance, though, and I discovered that he was not gentleman enough to give me credit for all that he should have done, and so we quarrelled, and there's his last dying speech and confession."

She pointed to the fire, and laughed pleasantly enough as she concluded; but, actress though she was, I knew her heart was aching that night.

"And you have never told me a word of this," I said reproachfully. "How is it that you have met without my knowledge?—how is it that——"

"We did meet, that's all, Faith. Remember, there is to be no cross-examination of the defendant."

I was silent after this remonstrance. She fell once more into thought, though she affected to be singing softly to herself, and I was left to marvel at that romance of her life which had flowed on so noiselessly beside me, and I never the wiser by a word or look. I could remember many excuses for her going out in the after-

noon and early evening alone now, and I reconciled these departures with the lovers' meetings, which might be never again for her. Yes, I *was* of a curious nature, for I longed for the details of a love-story that she had made up her mind not to tell me—how it had begun, and what had put an end to it? Who was the lover, what was he like, and when had the beginning of love first given hope to her heart? It was very strange that I should not know this—and that even to Katie I should seem undeserving of a sister's confidence. Something akin to my last thought suggested itself to her, for she said suddenly,

“I don't tell you a long story, Faith, for the simple reason that I know what a silly I have been, and that I cannot dwell upon anything which sets me in a ridiculous light. But, my girl, I am not heart-broken—I am not going to let down my back hair, and run about with a whole stableful of straw in my hands, as that misguided young woman in *Hamlet* did—I am for myself alone.”

“And for me a little?” I added.

“Yes—for you a little. For a moment, Faith, I had almost forgotten you, and yet what a good, brave woman you are!”

“And when the time comes, and the power is in my hands to help you, you will come to me, Katie?”

“Yes—with all my heart,” she murmured.

She turned away her head beneath my caress, and I was sure that tears were falling in the firelight, though she did not care that I should be a witness to her weakness.

She recovered herself very quickly; the enviable art of concealing her emotions, or shaking them away, was hers in an extraordinary degree—the result of early struggling in the world, combined with a natural power of self-repression.

“What a time that girl is with the supper-tray!” were her next words, “and I am dreadfully hungry.”

When the supper was brought in she did not show much signs of hunger, however; and when the tray was carried away after supper, she suddenly put her second letter into my hands.

"I forgot to say, Faith, that that's for you."

"For me?" I said in astonishment.

"Yes, and I know what's in it, too. But read for yourself."

I opened the note, and read as follows:

"Mr. Baxter presents his compliments to Miss Kirby, and requests the favour of her company to the annual pic-nic of the artistes of his establishment, at Bushey Park, on Wednesday morning next. The carriages will start from the Hall of Harmony at ten in the morning precisely. An answer will oblige."

"I—I go with them!" I cried. "What made him think that I should dream of it?"

"I made him think of it, Katie, for I asked him to ask you."

She laughed at my consternation, then said more earnestly—

"And I want you to go. I want you to take care of me, and be my guide—to be the friend to whom I can turn suddenly, should I want a friend."

"I do not see that I——"

"*He* may be there, and I wish to be very firm



and proud with him if he comes, if he should think it worth his while to venture in my direction. I know that you would not go to this pic-nic for your own sake. Will you come for mine?"

"Yes, if you wish it."

"There's a dear, good Faith. It will be one of the great Baxter's monster advertisements," she said; "but it will be amusing, and I am compelled to go. Now write your answer before your courage fails you, then I shall be satisfied and safe."

"Very well."

I wrote the answer, sadly and doubtfully, but I did not hesitate. Katie had wished it—she was afraid of something, it was evident—she relied even upon me, which was remarkable.

The servant was dispatched to the pillar-box with the two notes I had written that evening; to one of them, and to the surprise of both of us, there came an answer before twenty-four hours had elapsed. This was it:—

"434, Belgrave Square.

"X. Y. Z. would be glad of an interview with

Miss Kirby respecting the post of governess for which she has applied. X. Y. Z. would be glad to see Miss Kirby at the above address on Saturday next, at eleven a.m. precisely."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE RIDE TO BUSHEY PARK.

THE letter from X. Y. Z., appointing an interview for the following Saturday was a perplexity to me ; I had become so accustomed to silence following all appeals for service, that this prompt reply of an anonymous correspondent excited me more than I had anticipated. I had written without a hope ; I had related my old story with less perspicuity and energy than usual, and had too plainly, I thought, confessed to my own shortcomings, to be singled out from an army of applicants hungry for place.

Certainly I had not obtained the post. "It might be a swindle altogether," Katie had said

emphatically ; curiosity might have prompted the advertiser to see a person who had written so strange a reply to his advertisement ; or a crafty agent, anxious to secure a registration fee, might be the real solution to the riddle. And yet I had expected to be lucky some day ; I had not believed in misfortune for ever oppressing me, and thwarting every step to get away from it ; my own teaching and trust assured me of a better time, and I had kept strong with that assurance.

Katie had no faith in the result, and so terrified me with legends of designing advertisers, that I took one preliminary walk to Belgrave Square to see No 434 for myself, and judge if it was a respectable-looking edifice. I found it all that could be desired in its exterior aspect, not a place likely to be selected as the headquarters of a rogue or vagabond. It was a solid-looking mansion, wherein dwelt people well-to-do. I should be a lucky woman if I found a home there.

I acquainted Katie, on my return, with the result of my explorations, but she had lost a

great deal of interest in the subject. It had not entered into her head that there was a chance of my obtaining the situation without references—men and women of the world were not likely to believe in South Africa—and there were portions of my family's antecedents that I must conceal, or by divulging must set my listeners against me. I was "hedged in," and Katie had no faith in my escape. She had settled the position in her own mind, and there was an end of it. She had her own story to dwell upon, and that troubled her at times. Alone she brooded not a little, I was sure, although she never confessed to me that she was anything different from the light-hearted, shrewd little woman to whom I was indebted for a home. Coming in suddenly, I would surprise her in deep thought, her big hazel eyes looking out across her own world to the sphere wherein she had met her one romance and lost it, her beautiful face full of a grief or pain that my presence would startle away.

When we had first met, I had not been astonished at her reticence ; it was natural ; I had

been four years away, and had returned with very opposite ideas of life's duties from her own; but her silence now, concerning herself and her future, wounded me deeply. I thought that she might have learned to trust me. We were more like common friends than sisters in many things; we did not confide in each other; I knew too well that I could not interest Katie in all that was in my heart, or formed part of my ambitions, and she was certain that her profession was only suggestive to me of alarm. Hence, though we had our little outbursts of sympathy, we were never real confidantes; if we had been, this story would have taken different lines and led to different results—whether for better or worse, the reader must judge for himself in the future pages of this book.

Hence Katie had her cares, which she did not ask me to share, which she would not have owned to possessing. She professed to have the pic-nic party on her mind now, the dress she would wear, the business engagements that might ensue from it, and the pleasure that might be born of it. She was anxious to interest me

also, and was for ever reminding me that I had promised to accompany her, though she said not a word more concerning her reasons for my going. When the Wednesday morning came, I would have given all my worldly possessions—Katie's locket, which I had redeemed from the pawnbrokers, excepted—to be spared the ordeal of accompanying the procession. I had been nervous concerning it all Tuesday, and I prayed heartily for a respite, for wet weather, for anything that might postpone the evil day which had dawned.

I was wanting in the art of adaptability to circumstances, in the power to disguise what annoyed me, and I did not wish to be marked, or be in any way a contrast to the general enjoyment.

"If I could only stop at home!" I said to Katie at the last moment.

"Nonsense! the drive into the country will do you good," Katie replied; "you will not be noticed if it's your wish to keep aloof, and you will find some pleasant people if you care to look for them. We are not all ogres and ogresses."

Not all—not half, possibly ; but still, to my mind, having a sufficient number of ogres and ogresses in their midst to render the whole expedition an unpleasant one. I should not dwell upon it in detail here, were it not that it takes its place in the chain of events leading up to many changes.

I am never likely to forget the grand start from the Hall of Harmony, in drags, wagonettes, and private omnibuses, with Tommy Pounce's equipage a principal feature in the grand procession. Katie was right about this being a monster advertisement for Mr. Baxter, who combined pleasure to his *employés* with notoriety to himself, by the annual entertainment to which I had been invited. Katie and I were late in arriving at the meeting-place, where we found the street choked up with that large section of the British public that has nothing to do but take its ease on kerb-stones when there is anything worth seeing in prospective.

If X. Y. Z. could behold me now ! I thought, as I clutched Katie's arm in my first alarm at a cheer which greeted my sister's appearance be-



fore the Hall of Harmony, in the principal corridor of which the members of the company were waiting, all in high spirits and most of them in bright colours ; with Mr. Baxter running about in a state of great excitement, his arms full of bouquets for the ladies, and a great deal of the blood in his body settling in his face and behind his ears.

“ Let me keep close to you, Katie ; don’t run away,” I whispered, and Katie turned round and laughed at me.

“ This is my strong-minded sister, who would do me so much good,” she said.

The words were spoken lightly, and were not meant for a reproach, but they struck home. She was right ; why should I expect one so self-possessed and strong to rely upon me in any particular ? Did she not know the world better than I ? and was she not far more calculated to take care of herself therein ?

Ah ! yes, but it was this world from which we should escape presently, I thought.

Katie was a general favourite, and her welcome was a flattering one.

"I was afraid you were going to sell us," cried a lady of six-and-twenty, with charming frankness—a lady who carried much colour unblushingly in the broad day-light, and whose arched eyebrows were unmistakable works of art; "why, where have you been all this time?"

"Getting ready, to be sure. Tilly, this is my particular friend Miss Kirby—Faith, my dear friend Tilly Beaufort, of whom you have heard me speak."

I was attempting a bow of acknowledgment, when Tilly Beaufort took me in her arms, crushed my bonnet, and embraced me passionately.

"My dear child, how are you?" she cried; "I am glad to see you—I know all about you—you're Katie's friend from Africa. I knew Kate when she was a Kirby, in Dorset Street; she touched up my music a bit, before I was a great gun, and I got her out at my benefit, with a big cram about her American reputation. Did she ever tell you?"

"Yes, she told me," I found room to say; and

then Tilly Beaufort, the popular female vocalist, went away, laughing heartily and showing every one of her large, handsome teeth.

“What do you think of her?” asked Katie.

“Well, I don’t like her much,” I answered.

“You don’t like anybody much,” said Kate quietly, “but with all her vulgarity—she *is* a little vulgar—there isn’t a better-hearted woman. When I tell you that I’m not jealous of her popularity, you may imagine that I like her. Here’s Tommy.”

“Oh, dear!” I ejaculated.

Tommy Pounce was upon us before I had time to repress my exclamation. He was as elaborately costumed as usual, and burdened by a few ounces more jewelry than when I had last the honour of seeing him. Though gorgeously arrayed, he was not in good spirits. A zephyr coat, a silky white hat, light lavender kid gloves, a green satin stock with a diamond pin therein, a pair of lavender trousers with a green stripe down the side to match the stock, had given, with other adornments, a glory to his outer man of which any star-comic

might have been proud; and yet it was evident, from his depressing cast of countenance, that something had gone wrong with the "Colossal."

When he spoke, the reason was apparent.

"Well, Kate—how are you, Miss Kirby?" he croaked forth in tones that were partly sepulchral, and partly like a wheezy old bagpipes.

"Oh, dear! what a bad cold you have got," said Katie, solicitously, after we had responded to his welcome.

"Yes, I should think I had," replied Mr. Pounce; "it's all that infernal open-air trap of Baxter's. I've been out in all weathers, and you'll be sorry to hear it's flown to my throat."

"Oh! I *am* sorry," said Katie.

"My voice is nowhere," he added, after two or three seconds' coughing.

"You were all right last night," Katie remarked.

"Yes, till I got home, and then it was like a hundred cussed darning needles in my throat. I'm afraid it's what they call dipsteeria—I'm awfully queer."

“What made you come out?” said Katie.

“Oh, you know,” he answered meaningly, and “I’m sure I don’t,” was Katie’s pert reply.

“Of course I wanted to be one of the party, if you was—if you were coming,” he said, correcting his grammar with commendable celerity, “and I did not care to be out of it altogether, and everybody asking where Tommy Pounce was. Baxter says that the drive will cheer me up, and bring my voice round, but Baxter’s a hass. I don’t know what everybody ’ll do, if I don’t get better soon—there’s the Alcazar, and the Muses’ Temple, Cow Cross, and the Hapollo—they all count on me next Monday.”

“They’ll think all the more of you, Mr. Pounce, when you do appear,” said Katie in assuring tones.

“Yes, I know that,” said Pounce, after a moment’s rueful consideration of the subject, “but this is not a common hoarseness; it goes right to here,” he added, striking the pit of his stomach with the flat of his gloved hand, before he marched mournfully away from us.

A few minutes more, and we had made our

way into the street, and in the bustle of the mounting, the general excitement of the party, the confusion on all sides, I lost Katie, and found myself on the top of a private coach, by the side of Mr. Baxter, who had assisted me to the box-seat. I had made some little objection to this position, but the interiors of the vehicles were full of hampers, and the broad flight of steps marked "Hall of Harmony" formed a convenient and unembarrassing mode of ascent for a nervous young female. When I was settled, and had had time to reflect on the compliments that had been paid me by the proprietor of one of the largest drinking dens in the metropolis, I looked round for Katie. She was by the side of Tommy Pounce on the drag, wherein were Tilly Beaufort and a host of professionals, comic and serious, and all more or less notorious. Behind me were two or three large private omnibuses, heaped up with ladies of the ballet and their friends; and sprinkled among the general community were a few vacant-looking, silly-faced young men, whose mission it was to "see life," to patronise "this kind of

thing," to talk of the spree they had had with "Baxter's lot," and to affect in general to be more dissipated and unprincipled than even their worthlessness warranted. I wished again that I had not joined the party—the general survey of the company caused me to shudder so forcibly.

"Why, you're cold!" said Mr. Baxter, who was evidently of an observant turn of mind; "I'm blest if you ain't a-shivering! Will you have another shawl?—will you have a nip of brandy before we start?"

"No, thank you."

"Then we'll be off. I think we've had stir enough here for one day. What a 'ouse there'll be to-night!" he muttered.

He gave the signal for starting, and I drew my veil more closely over my face as the crowd cheered, and hundreds of little boys tried to get under the wheels and discover for themselves what the Juggernaut sensation was like, and everybody ran out of doors or looked out of windows. Then we wound our way through Surrey thoroughfares towards Vauxhall Bridge,



making our way for the Fulham and Richmond roads. It was a pleasant drive, and when we were free of the London streets, where it was Mr. Baxter's business to linger as long as possible, and attract as much curiosity and admiration from the masses as it was in his power to attract, I was more at my ease. But oh, those dreadful streets before the country road was reached, the blank stares of people to whom music-halls were unknown territories, the wondering glances, the envious, the admiring, the contemptuous !

"There's Tommy Pounce ; hooray, Tommy !" was shouted forth at times, and indeed, all those whose popularity had secured them a footing at more than one place of entertainment had their reward, in being pointed at and shouted at until the busy streets of town were left behind us.

"I hope you're comfortable, Miss Kirby?" said Mr. Baxter, when he had leisure to devote more time to me, and less to his horses.

"Yes, thank you," I replied.

I had resolved to be as amiable as possible, for Katie's sake ; this man at my side paid Katie



a liberal sum per week for singing at his establishment.

"I think we shall have a fine day," he said suddenly, in those thick tones which, on my first acquaintance with him, I had very unjustly attributed to drink; "the clouds are high, and the sun's as warm and bright as ninepence. Do you know Bushey Park?"

"Yes, I remember it."

I had gone once to it when a child, with father; he had taken Katie and me for a day's holiday on a river steamer, as far as Hampton, and we were a happy trio then. I wondered on the instant whether Katie remembered it as well as I did.

"It's a stunning place for a pic-nic," affirmed Mr. Baxter.

"Indeed!"

Mr. Baxter was a polite man, and a loquacious man, but he was not refined in his discourse. Originally he had been a pot-boy at a publican's in South Bermondsey, and there were invidious folk existent who maintained that "old Baxter" could neither read nor write,

but in this particular they were incorrect. Take him altogether, he was, in my poor estimation, and at that time, a prince of gentlemen to Tommy Pounce, although I hoped that I might be mercifully spared from seeing him again.

Before we reached Richmond, I discovered Mr. Baxter's motives—for he had more than one—in placing me in the post of honour at his side. I cannot say that they were motives discreditable to him, but they annoyed me none the less, and at Bushey Park I began to think that I liked Tommy Pounce the better of the two. So that the reader may perceive I was capricious in my fancies.

“Are Tommy and Katie going to make a match of it, do you think?” he asked suddenly, and after following my backward glance at the drag, where the two were talking earnestly together.

“Heaven forbid!” I cried, before I had time to restrain myself.

“Everybody says so, you know,” he said with a disgusting wink of his left eye, intended as a

tribute to the clear-sightedness of everybody, himself included.

"Everybody is wrong," I said warmly, "and Katie is not likely to thank anyone for spreading the report."

"It wouldn't be a bad match," he said slowly.

"I think it would be a very bad one."

"What makes you think that, Miss Kirby?"

He appeared so curious that his manner put me on my guard, and though I still maintained my first assertion, I did not enter into detail concerning my reason for doubting a statement in which he was disposed to place credence. I was Katie's friend, and might be able to give him a hint or two, he had thought, and he was not a sufficient adept in disguise to conceal from me what was on his mind.

"Tommy's fond of her, I'm sure," he said; "he has been awfully upset about that young swell who came after her so much; awfully cut up, in fact, and though he made love to Tilly Beaufort, it was only his temper. Don't you really think they'd make a decent pair, now?"

"No, I do not."

“Hasn’t Katie said anything about Tommy, now?” he inquired; “about marrying him, and starting a music-hall of their own?—where they’d be sure to fail,” he added with sudden and amazing energy; “I’m sure you know all about it.”

“Miss Baskerville”—I had some difficulty in calling Katie by her assumed name—“does not take me into her confidence,” I replied.

“Oh! that’s all nonsense. Girls will talk, and you are together in Long Acre, you know. Ain’t you, now?”

Mr. Baxter’s “nows” were particularly aggravating, especially when they were accompanied with a playful nudge of his elbow, which was not unfrequent.

“Yes, we are together.”

“Like sisters, in fact; ah, ha! like sisters,” and this time he nearly nudged me off the box-seat into the roadway. I did not reply; I did not like Mr. Baxter quite so well as I had done; I moved as far from him and his objectionable elbow as I could, and looked straight before me along the high road, echoing with the clatter of

our horses' hoofs and the merry laughter of the party. I saw that our secret, such as it was, had been discovered by Mr. Baxter. The likeness between us was too strong for disguise, and yet I had never considered myself much like Katie.

Katie was darker than I, and the resemblance had been more marked when we were children, I fancied. She was pretty, and I was rather a plain little thing—Uncle Jef told me that, with his own odd frankness, one day in Pietermaritzburg—but still the likeness was strong enough to open Mr. Baxter's eyes to the truth.

"I don't say you are sisters, mind," said he, after an interval of five minutes for mature reflection; "that may be a little joke of mine. Still you *are* alike, and I'm dashed if you don't sing alike too, for when I called four weeks ago—that day I was in a worry about Katie going to the Jolly Plasterers' benefit—I didn't say anything, but you were singing as I came up them stairs in Long Acre, and I stopped outside the door and listened a bit. Ah, ha! Don't you sing, now?"

Here ensued another playful motion of his elbow, which I managed to elude.

“I have led a choir at chapel, in Pietermaritzburg, but I do not profess to sing.”

“You’ve a good voice, ’pon my soul; I’ve been thinking of it, and it’s suited for the sentimental line of business,” he continued; “I wish you’d try it one night at the Hall—say a Hafrican gal going into slavery, now—a character bit. If it answers with the hordience, I’ll strike a bargain the moment you come off. There, I’ll strike a bargain at once, if you’re game.”

But I was not game. I felt very much as though I had been insulted, and yet I had not a fair excuse to speak my mind. I could only thank him in a low voice, and state that it was never my intention to sing in public; after which expression of my sentiments, Mr. Baxter appeared to lose a great deal of his interest in me. I looked behind at Katie occasionally, and saw that she was in high spirits, with no sign of yesternight’s strange shadow on her. I could hear her laughing pleasantly at Tommy Pounce’s

jokes, or at Tommy Pounce's personal appearance, which was not enhanced by a very large woollen comforter that, having found the breeze too strong for him, he had recently wound round his throat in many folds. Tilly Beaufort appeared more anxious about his cold than my sister, and once I had seen her carefully tucking in the corners of the comforter down the back of his neck, with a solicitude about the Colossal's health that should have impressed that gentleman more favourably. Mr. Baxter said again to my annoyance, as he glanced in my direction also, "Tommy is dead nuts on Katie. I wonder you haven't seen it; I wonder she hasn't told you more about it, now."

"Dead nuts" implied a deep affection on Mr. Pounce's part for Katie, I imagined by the context; I was getting used to the slang of these people—perhaps, if I stayed much longer with them, I should get slangy myself.

I was glad when Bushey Park was reached, and the opportunity to get free of Mr. Baxter, and reach Katie's side, seemed to come at length as a reward for all my patience. I looked at



my watch—another redeemed pledge which Katie had kindly got out of the pawnbroker's clutches for me—and found that the morning had already passed away. That made so many hours nearer to home, and I was glad in my heart. Perhaps I was ungrateful—very probably ; I was a young woman of a dissatisfied turn of mind altogether ; Katie had a suspicion that way, and I was not quite certain that she was altogether wrong.

Had I been content with anything?—in the old times in London with my surroundings ; in the African colony, or with my still life away from all friends but Uncle Jef ; in London again, with my troubles clustering so thickly about me that every fairer prospect of a future was shut out by their density and number ? Was there anything that *would* satisfy me, or stay the restless beatings of my heart against the bars of the cage that held me in ?



## CHAPTER IV.

## I ENACT THE CHAMPION.

I WAS successful in eluding further attention on the part of Mr. Baxter, or Mr. Baxter had too much upon his mind to consider me, when the real business of the pic-nic had commenced ; but in my second determination to take care of Katie—as she had asked me to do last night—I met with nothing but mortification and rebuff. Katie had forgotten her request, and had almost forgotten me. The excitement of the day, the pleasure of the drive, the fresh air, the scenery, the company, the consciousness that she was a favourite with her contemporaries, had carried away all traces of past gloom, even raised her spirits to a degree which I had not hitherto

witnessed. She was the life of the party, and gave animation to the rest. She took an active part in the arrangements for the coming luncheon, and there was a bright smile, a gay jest, a quick laughing rejoinder for all who spoke to her.

“How well she bears trouble!” I thought, as I watched her bright figure in the sunshine; “or else,” was my second reflection, “how little she lets trouble bear upon her!”

There are those happily constituted beings in the world whom no trouble seems to affect, more especially those troubles that do not come straight home to them, and perhaps Katie was one of these. Katie thought that I met troubles half way, and pitied me accordingly; and certainly, at this period of our lives, she was by ninety per cent. the happier woman of the two. Heaven knows, I did not envy her for this! It was as well for her that she could face the world with a bolder outlook than her sister Faith.

“Why, Faith, how grave you are looking!” said Katie, coming up to me at last, “although

the ride has brought some of the old colour to your cheeks. What a glorious day! I feel better and stronger for it."

"I am glad to hear it, Katie, but——"

"Well, but——"

"Has he come?"

"Who?—oh, no, *he* hasn't," she answered very quickly, "and so much the better for all parties concerned. I don't want to see him. I can be happy enough without him. We're going to dance after luncheon—the band is coming down to Teddington by train—what partners can I get you, Faith?"

"I shall not dance."

"I hope you will; you must not stand aloof, or look too fine for us. Would you like to waltz with Tommy Pounce?"

"Oh, no, I should not like to do that!" I cried with a shiver.

"Well, he's not in good spirits—he's very ill, he says, and is trying Mr. Baxter's recipe of horse-radish and vinegar for his voice—there he is, sitting with his back against the tree."

"I hope the recipe will do him good," I said;

and then at the sight of Mr. Pounce, consuming his specific in the shade, and with a woe-begone expression of countenance, I could not forbear laughing.

“That’s well, Faith,” cried Katie, “you are brighter—you’re shaking off by degrees some of the grave looks. Poor Tommy ! so you hope it will do him good ; *I* hope it will not.”

“Oh, Katie !”

“The hoarser he gets, the less I shall have of his nonsense,” she cried ; “the more he will think of himself, and the less of me.”

She tripped away, humming one of her own songs, and the instant afterwards was flirting in an animated way over the laying out of the lobster salads with an idiotic youth who wore a glass in his left eye, kept his right half closed, and his mouth three-quarters open. I was told that he was a lord’s son, and I pitied the lord very much.

The scene was novel and amusing, and had I not been intimately connected therewith, I should have enjoyed it the more. I was embarrassed in the midst of it, but with Katie

occasionally glancing in my direction, I did my best to sustain the character which it had been her wish that I should assume. I endeavoured to make myself generally agreeable—and upon the whole I succeeded tolerably well.

All was full of animation, and there was nothing to object to in the fun and spirit pervading the community. The old park through which the patriotic cobbler of Hampton Wick secured the right of way was at its best, and the day was at its best also. The chestnut-trees were full of deep green shadowings, with their branches borne down by the clusters of the cones—it would be Chestnut Sunday in five more days—the shy deer were in the distance, making up their minds to approach us presently for gift-offerings—the sky was intensely blue over our heads, the sun was shining, and the birds were singing amongst the leaves, or darting to and fro across the landscape.

There was more gaiety after the champagne lunch—but then there always *is* a greater flow of spirits after the wine has been drunk—and though I did not dance, I took some amuse-

ment from watching the toy-like figures that were spinning round me.

The annual pic-nic was a success; it would have been written down a success in one or two peculiar papers at least, under any circumstances—for there were the reporters, and much had been made of them by Mr. Baxter, so much that the gentleman sent by the *Music Hall Trumpet* was lying face downwards on the grass, with his hat crushed beneath his chest, “a little overcome,” as Katie delicately put it.

I considered it a success until half-past three in the afternoon, and then I found myself drawing further from the scene, becoming as it were afraid or distrustful of the actors therein. The excitement and noise became more fast and furious amongst a few—not amongst the majority perhaps—the dancing grew more vigorous, and the laughter shriller.

There was a proneness to extravagance of action in some of the ladies of the company, and their loud screams of hilarity jarred upon me and vexed me.

I watched Katie anxiously, but I had nothing

to fear from her. Her high spirits had not increased with the lateness of the hour. She was sitting by the side of Mr. Pounce, talking quite seriously to him, but looking thoughtfully ahead, as if he were a long way from her; and he, I knew, was in a very serious mood himself. Only half an hour since, I had heard him huskily inform Mr. Baxter that he was almost speechless, that he had been a fool to come, and that that "beastly mess of horse-radish" had made him as sick as a dog—sicker than twenty dogs, for he was not quite sure that he should live the day out, or ever hear the sound of his natural voice again. "How everybody will be disappointed to-night, Baxter!" he had said with a sigh; "not a note of mine to be heard anywhere. Good gord! what a blow to business, and to all the Halls!"

He was looking very miserable by Katie's side, and my sister was evidently having all the conversation to herself, and doing all the consolation; with Tilly Beaufort regarding the couple over the shoulder of her partner in a waltz, with a less amiable expression than might



have been expected from a naturally good-tempered countenance.

I was standing apart from the pic-nic, under the shadow of the trees, when an old lady who had been one of the party, and whose grey hairs had been a contrast to much youth and good looks about her, startled me by a few words in my ear. She had been very busy packing the glass into the hampers near me, but I had not noticed her till then.

"I don't think you are enjoying yourself, young lady," she said.

"Oh, yes, I am," I hastened to reply.

"You are frightened of them?"

"N—no," I answered, after a moment's consideration of the question, "I am not frightened, but I do not quite like their ways."

"Yet you are often at the music-halls with your friend Miss Baskerville."

"Yes," I said.

"You have been frightened before to-day—may I ask if you are a lady?"

"No," I said, smiling.

"I mean a lady born."



"No," I said again.

"You do not understand them or care for them, I'm sure," she said, as she continued her packing; "if I were you, I would not stop with them. Can't you get a situation somewhere, and leave this life behind you?"

"Is it not an honest life?" I asked quickly; "do you know that it is not?"

"There are good and bad amongst them—many hard-working ones," she replied, as she went on with her packing; "not a few whom you should naturally despise—all kinds of people to suit all kinds of tastes, except the taste for a simple life and quiet home. My dear young lady, I'm your senior by many years; take an old woman's advice, and follow your natural inclination to escape."

"It is not fit——"

"For any young girl? Emphatically no."

She broke a tumbler over her emphasis, appeared a little scared at the damage which she had committed, looked round for Mr. Baxter, and then secretly threw away the broken fragments amongst the glass.

“What is your post at the Hall of Harmony?”  
I asked.

“I am not at the Hall of Harmony. My name is Saville, and I am Miss Beaufort’s dresser.”

“I understand.”

“I was Miss Baskerville’s dresser once, but nothing satisfied the girl.”

“But——”

“But please don’t mention this; I might lose my situation, and I am old and poor. I was a lady once, and so I have never quite got used to this. Neither will you; these aristocratic Beauforts and Baskervilles,” she said scornfully, “are very good people of their kind, but get away from them as soon as you can.”

“You do not know anything against them?”

“Not a word—not of those two—save that they are fast and flippant; but it would not do you any harm to drop their acquaintance, I’m thinking.”

She caught up a small basket of wine-glasses, and walked away with it. I looked after her with a sinking heart, and a desire to follow and

cross-examine her, with the old horror of this life coming once more to the front to scare me. The woman who had been a lady walked with vacillating steps; once went erratically to the left, paused, and then went to the right, where some more subordinates were busy over hampers. She had been drinking, hence her freedom of speech and general eccentricity of manner; but the woman in her drink seemed to have shown an interest in me, and given me fresh warning—even a warning, partly implied, that my sister was a dangerous acquaintance! She had not observed the likeness between Katie and me, as Mr. Baxter had done, but she had spoken with a startling frankness.

More fast and furious became the revel with the lengthening shadows on the grass; I could tell easily enough, as I wandered sadly to and fro, who were the black sheep of the flock, now that all self-restraint had vanished, and wine had betrayed them, as it had done even the old woman, who had been born a lady. The vacuous young men looked more vacuous still; the best of them were drunk and prostrate, and the worst

were noisy and obtrusive, having the looks and manners of satyrs.

Many pedestrians through the park gave the screaming revellers a wider berth, and the occupants of passing carriages surveyed us curiously, and wondered who we were that made the bright day hideous.

Suddenly there was more noise and shrill laughter than I had hitherto heard, and a well-dressed girl, pale with fright, ran hurriedly by, followed by a dozen men and women screaming after her, pelting her with little tufts of grass and bon-bons, till she stopped suddenly and faced them almost defiantly. The look with which she confronted them would have become an older child, and would have abashed less foolish people than those who now joined hands and commenced a maniacal dance round her.

“How dare you frighten me?” she cried, very pale still, but very indignant with her persecutors; “you are not ladies and gentlemen, or you would never do it. My papa will not let me

be treated like this. You shall be punished, every one of you."

"No, we're not ladies and gentlemen, little Miss Minx," said a bold-faced girl whom I had seen in the ballet at the Hall of Harmony; "but we shall be very happy to make your father's acquaintance, and we shan't let you go till we like. You said you wouldn't drink our healths, and that was not polite, my dear."

"She shall kiss one of us instead—hic—and then we'll let her go—one of the no-gentlemen lot—hooray!—whoop!—which is it to be, my old-fashioned chick?"

The man who had delivered this was a short, thick-set man, with a stubby beard—an opposition comic to the great Pounce, and one whom I had heard sing occasionally. He was very drunk, and very horrible in his drink. I forgot all reserve in my concern for the child, and broke hastily through the circle.

"Please do not insult her," I said, taking her hand; "you should know better than that, at least."

My face was familiar to them, and the indigna-

tion therein was so very strongly expressed that a few of the most timid dropped hands at once, and regarded me with surprise. I felt the little hot hand of the child close upon mine nervously but trustfully, and two big blue eyes looked quickly up at me with a wistful gaze.

"Thank you very much," she said; "and please take me to my papa."

"Where is he?"

"Coming to meet me, over there," she said, pointing in the direction of Teddington. "Please take me from these people."

There was a spirit of opposition manifested, but I endeavoured to subdue it. I am sure that I lost my temper in the effort; I who had a supreme conceit in my own amiability before this! My passion overmastered me at last, and upon future reflection astonished even myself.

"I don't think it's any business of yours to interfere," said the girl whom I had already indicated; "it's only a bit of fun, and you ought to be able to see that, if the child can't."

"I don't see any fun in it," I replied.

"You're not everybody, just because you are Miss Baskerville's friend, you know," cried the ballet-girl, tauntingly. "This stuck-up little child talked to us first, and we had a bit of a game, that's all."

"And she isn't going without she kisses one of us. I say it, Jack Cowl, of the North-West London," cried the comic man, reeling towards her amidst the laughter of the rest. "Here, Miss Thingamy, come and kiss your best friend, and make it up. Then you can go—not before."

Everybody around us saw something to laugh and scream at in this, or in the child's fright, as she clung to the skirts of my dress and hid her face away.

"Will you stand aside, you cowards?" I cried passionately; and as I moved on with the child they fell back, and allowed me to pass them.

"Oh, where is my papa?" the child exclaimed; "how late he is!—why don't he come to help me?"

"You are quite safe with me," I said assuringly.



"You don't look very strong," she replied, "and there are so many of these dreadful people about."

"They will not molest us."

In my heart I was not quite certain, for Mr. Chowl, of the North-West London Music Hall, came in an unsteady manner after us. I looked for help from Katie, even from Tommy Pounce the Colossal, but they were strolling far in advance of me along the path I was pursuing, and I was beyond their assistance. I glanced nervously round for Mr. Baxter, but he was not in sight, and there was no one else to whom I could appeal, or who would not laugh at me.

We went on a few more yards unmolested, then I felt the girl's hand tighten in mine.

"Oh, he's running after us—the dreadful little drunken man! You'll take care of me, my kind lady, will you not?"

"You are perfectly safe," I said again. I could not believe in any direct insult, and I relied on the protection of the most manly and most womanly of the party. I wished to avoid a scene if possible, and as the child gave



a faint scream, I urged her to be silent. By this time Mr. Chowl had reached our side, and was trying to keep step with us as we walked rapidly towards the gate opening into Teddington.

“Look here now,” said he, as his legs described small segments of circles and his feet revolved one over another in that odd manner peculiar to drunkards, “when I say a shing I stick to it. Jack Chowl’s my name—everybody knows it—and the Orl of ’Armony ain’t a-going to crow over me, or anyborry ’nected with it. There’s not one of ’em can sing—and that’s what I say. I wouldn’t—I wouldn’t hurta’air of child’s head, but it’s a biro’ fun—pure fun, ’sure you. I said that this—hic—little gal sh’d gie me kiss, and when say shing, Jack Chowl, Nor-West, means a shing. Take mehand, medear.”

He made one or two futile efforts to take hold of the child’s hand, but I transferred her quickly from the left to the right side of me, interposing myself between them. He was not to be balked, however. He endeavoured to pass behind

me in his drunken persistency, but at the same moment a strong hand clutched him by the collar of his coat, and hurled him with so much force and velocity away from us that I, who had been reserving my stock of screams for a future emergency, could not prevent one from suddenly escaping me, as Mr. Chowl went spinning off at a rapid rate until he fell of a heap in the grass, whence he moved not again.

“Papa!” the child called out, and then to my further surprise she let go my hand, and fainted away.

“Esther—Ettie, dear—keep strong—all is well now.” But the child lay senseless in the arms of the father, a tall, thin, dark-skinned man, whose stern face I did not recognise immediately in my concern for his daughter.

“What can I do—can I be of any assistance?” I inquired.

“No—thank you. She is subject to these swoons,” he said hurriedly, as he rose with his child in his arms—“she has been excited—my carriage is close at hand—thank you, young lady—if you will follow me, I will see that that

party of mountebanks do not insult you for your kindness to my child."

"Thank you," I murmured in a low voice.

But I did not follow him. I was not afraid of molestation—I was one of the party myself—and I had recognised him at last. It was he who had supported me in a fainting fit of my own, at the offices of Westmair and Co., in Watling Street. It was Abel Westmair, the principal of the firm, the hard-hearted, merciless man who had been the cause of all our troubles by locking up my father for felony.

I looked after him, as he strode rapidly away, unconscious that I was not following him, and holding to his breast the little girl whom excitement had suddenly prostrated. It was all very like a dream—his coming in the midst of it, a more unreal and dream-like situation still. I was glad that he had not remembered me, or asked me any questions—that he had passed away once more from my life, which he had helped to oppress and darken. I could not take my eyes from him until he was lost in the distance, and the noisy laughter of the mounte-

banks, as he had termed them, seemed approaching more closely. The party were mustering for departure; they were picking up Mr. Chowl and trying to make him understand that they must put him inside one of the omnibuses, or leave him in the park. The vehicles had arrived to convey us to town. The ballet-girl with whom I had waged war was pointing me out to a few select friends and regarding me disdainfully. The hampers had been stowed away. The choice young men, the lord's son amongst their number, had lighted fresh cigars and taken parting drinks. Katie, Tommy Pounce, and Mr. Baxter had risen as if from the dead about me. They were beginning to cluster on the roofs of the coaches and omnibuses, and to fill Tommy Pounce's drag, and there was much hilarity under the wide-spreading chestnuts.

Still I stood there as in a trance, watching and wondering deeply, until Katie came softly behind me, took me by the arms, and shook me playfully.

“What, dreaming again, Faith! I hope you

have enjoyed yourself, and spent as pleasant a day as I have done."

She had heard and seen nothing of the incident that had disturbed me, and I did not care to tell her of it then. I thought rather of her own life and mystery, as her brown eyes looked tenderly into mine.

"It has been a fine day fortunately," I answered in an evasive manner; "but you did not want me, Katie, after all."

"No, he did not care enough for me to come," she said, "and so much the better. Whose loss is it? Not little Kate Kirby's surely."

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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